NO SIMPLE PROXY

Israel in Central America

A Report By
Jane Hunter
Washington Middle East Associates

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INTRODUCTION

In issuing this report, No Simple Proxy: Israel in Central America, we present a challenge to those concerned with peace and justice in Central America.

For the past ten years, Israel has pursued policies in Central America which violate U.S. law and/or undercut U.S. congressional efforts to exercise a more positive influence on the social and political conditions in the region.

No Simple Proxy presents five blatant examples of these Israeli policies.

In 1975, Israel began supplying the Honduran government with refurbished French super-Mystere B-2s. Since six of the 20 planes had U.S.-made engines, U.S. permission was required before such a sale. Israel neither sought nor received any such permission. Not only was the sale, therefore, in clear violation of U.S. law, but it also significantly raised the level of military technological sophistication throughout the region.

When, in 1977, the Carter Administration cut off U.S. military assistance to El Salvador, the Salvadoran

government turned immediately to Israel for help. Israel went on to supply up to 85% of El Salvador's military needs, until the Reagan Administration resumed the flow of U.S. aid in the 1980s. Thus the Carter Administration's efforts (and those of U.S. peace and human rights organizations) to pressure El Salvador's government on human rights issues were undercut by its closest Middle East ally, Israel.

In 1978 Carter halted the flow of U.S. arms and other assistance to Nicaragua in protest against flagrant human rights abuses under the Somoza dictatorship. Again, Israel stepped in with the weapons and materiel Somoza needed for his bloody war of repression -- providing him with the means to survive until the following July.

Following the suspension of U.S. aid to Guatemala (in 1977), Israel has supplied nearly 100% of that government's weapons. Israeli advisors have also trained Guatemala's police and intelligence units and have guided the armed forces in establishing a rural "pacification" program.

Finally, No Simple Proxy presents all of the documented material establishing that, since 1982, Israel has been giving significant amounts of military support to the contras -- often routing such aid through their military and diplomatic connections in the Honduran and Costa Rican governments.

* * *

A study of the relationship between U.S. and Israeli involvement in Central America shows it to be not unlike a see-saw. When the U.S. must lower its intervention in one or another Central American country, the level of Israeli involvement rises.

While demonstrating this pattern, No Simple Proxy makes it clear that Israel is neither a simple proxy of the U.S. (as some on the left have argued) nor is it an abused, coerced client (as some Israeli apologists have maintained). Israel has its own foreign policy objectives in Central America and in its relationship with the United

States. As Chapter 7 of this study makes clear, these objectives center on the need to establish and maintain markets for Israel's growing arms industry, the growth of which has become essential to Israel's troubled economy.

During the Carter years, Israel was able to take advantage of the open arms markets in Central America created by the application of U.S. human rights policy in the region. Far from serving as a U.S. proxy during this period, Israel quite deliberately pursued policies contrary to those established by the Carter Administration and Congress.

But with the advent of President Reagan's administration and subsequent reorienting of U.S. foreign policy, Israel, in an effort to secure new arms markets and maintain old ones, has sought to more firmly establish itself as an alternative -- and complement -- to the United States in the region.

Recognizing that Congress would not give Reagan the free hand he wanted to rearm with U.S. weapons the repressive right-wing regimes of Central America, Israel proposed a plan. Israeli cabinet minister without portfolio, Ya'acov Meridor, urged the Reagan Administration to consider the following:

> Don't compete with us in South Africa. Don't compete with us in the Caribbean area or in any other country where you can't operate in the open. Let us do it. I even use the expression, "You sell the ammunition and equipment by proxy. Israel will be your proxy." And this could be worked out with a certain agreement with the United States where we will have certain markets . . . which will be left for us.

This "Meridor Plan" was written into the U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding of 1981. With such an "understanding" in place, Israel was free to assume that not only would its existing markets remain secure, but that it would enhance its position vis a vis potential new clients.

> Israeli officials claim that one of the advantages Israel will gain from the new strategic accord with the United States will be a greater role in the Third World. The leaders of pro-Western regimes in the Third World, especially those of countries that have unpopular, authoritarian regimes and a negative image in Washington, would like to make use of of Israel's "American connection."
>
> --(Al-Hamishmar, December 29, 1981)

Being able to market its "American connection" is important for Israel's foreign policy strategists.

* * *

Thus, Israel's massive involvement in Central America -- begun during the Carter Administration -- has flourished with the Reagan Administration. While in the 1970s Israeli arms policy subverted U.S. policy in Central America, in the 1980s it established itself as a convenient proxy-like substitute for its North American ally.

Throughout this ten-year period, U.S. military aid to Israel has been used to undercut congressional policy in Central America. And, throughout it all, Congress has remained passive, as Israel's special U.S. relationship spares it both censure and sanction.

Israel's role in Central America ought to be of great concern to those concerned with peace and human rights in the region. Israeli arms policy, subsidized as it is by U.S. military aid, should no longer be immune from scrutiny.

At the very least, restrictions ought to be placed on the uses to which Israel can put U.S. aid. Israel should not be allowed to use its aid where Congress has forbidden both U.S. involvement and the use of U.S. funds.

On Thursday, January 29, 1987 the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence issued its long-awaited report on the scandal involving the White House, Israel, Iran and the contras. The report establishes beyond question the fact of Israeli arms transfers to Iran since 1982 and Israeli arms shipments to the contra movement over the last few years. In both instances, it is now clear, Israeli denials of shipments have been lies.

Israel's role in selling arms to Iran and in supplying weapons and funds to the U.S.- backed mercenaries fighting against the government of Nicaragua is nothing new -- except to the majority of Americans who heard little evidence of these dealings until November of 1986.

What is new is the recently uncovered link between the two operations. And, given the centrality of Israel's role, "Israelgate" may be the most appropriate term for describing this scandal.

Noam Chomsky, in an interview with News from Within, states that ". . . operations of that complexity are very hard to keep secret. Sooner or later something will break and when it breaks it becomes a scandal."*

The break came with the clumsy attempt to tie the hostage question to an operation already unwieldy because of its intricacies.

The elements of this scandal, when seen in the context of Jane Hunter's report, make even more urgent the need for Americans concerned with peace and human rights to raise the isses addressed here.

--James Zogby
February 1987

* "A Small Part of the International Terrorist Network," an interview with Noam Chomsky, News From Within (Vol. III, No. 1), January 10, 1987, p. 13.

Chapter 1

EL SALVADOR: THE ISRAELI ALTERNATIVE

Ernesto Liebes was one of the many people kidnapped in 1979 by rebel Salvador groups then building their war chests. But Liebes, a prominent member of San Salvador's Jewish community and Israel's honorary consul in El Salvador, was not held for ransom. Instead, he was executed "as a war criminal because of the role he played in the sale of Israeli aircraft to the Salvadoran armed forces," stated Ferman Cienfuegos, who later became commander-in-chief of the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), the insurgent forces opposing the government in San Salvador.[1]

Among those Israeli planes were rebuilt French Dassault Ouragan ground attack aircraft. The 18 Ouragans bought by the Salvadoran government between 1975 and 1981 were among the first jet fighters in Central America.[2] At a time when a goal of U.S. policy was to discourage the introduction of sophisticated weapons to regions that did not already have them, Israel's sale of jet fighters added a new level of danger to the enmity between El Salvador and Honduras which had flared into war in 1969.

Between 1973 and 1981, Israel also sold the government of El Salvador six Fouga Magister training

planes and an undetermined number of helicopters retired from its own arsenal, as well as 25 Arava STOL (Short Take Off and Landing) twin engine jets, a product of the Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) favored for counterinsurgency. The Salvadoran military ordered three more Aravas in 1982.

In 1977, during the period when those sales were taking place, the Carter Administration, citing human rights violations, cut off military aid to El Salvador. The Salvadoran government, in response, cut its military ties with the United States and turned to Israel. Until U.S. support of the Salvadoran military resumed in late 1980, Israel supplied 85 percent of El Salvador's weapons, including Uzi submachine guns, ammunition, rocket launchers, and spare parts.[3]

During this period, according to both the then U.S. ambassador in San Salvador and officers in the Salvadoran military, the Israeli government also sold napalm to the Salvadoran government. The napalm was reportedly used on the population as recently as April 1984.[4]

Some Kind of Advisers

Israel's relationship with El Salvador dates back at least to 1972, when Israel's Defense Ministry conducted a youth movement development program in El Salvador.[5] Soon after, Israeli advisers began working with Salvadoran military leaders.

Well before 1979, Israeli security advisers were training the Salvadoran secret police ANSESAL. One of their students was Roberto D'Aubuisson, then a minor officer, who would later become a key organizer of the right-wing death squads and a leader of the radical right Arena Party, and who was personally implicated in the murder of the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero.

Another student of the Israelis was Col. Sigifredo Ochoa Perez, who gained world attention when he rebelled against the Minister of Defense in 1983. Ochoa, who went

to Israel for part of his training, was -- in 1984 and 1985 -- in charge of the government's military campaign in Morazan and Chaletenango provinces, areas which had for years been under the control of the insurgent FMLN and its poltical affiliate, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). There he compiled a record of immense brutality, declaring populated areas "free fire zones," blocking food shipments, and forcing enrollment in "civil defense patrols."

That Ochoa's tactics resemble those used by Israel in Lebanon in 1982 is not coincidental: an ardent admirer of Israeli military prowess, he took inspiration from the invasion of Lebanon to suggest a similar assault on Nicaragua. For U.S. advisers in El Salvador, Ochoa has only contempt: "They lost the war in Vietnam," he says.[6]

In general, Salvadoran military leaders admire Israeli training and the aggressive military and occupation techniques Israel employs in the Middle East more than they do U.S. techniques. Some Salvadorans have complained about their U.S. advisers, asking them to change their training program or leave.[7]

In fact, some ultra-rightists who resent U.S. accusations about their association with death squads consider U.S. aid hardly worth the trouble. "We have survived without U.S. aid for many years," Arena Party leader Roberto D'Aubuisson said in January 1983. "U.S. aid came to us when the U.S. government got us into this problem -- that is, two or three years ago. El Salvador had always bought arms in other countries. . . . El Salvador can survive and move forward with or without the help of the U.S."[8]

Even after the United States began funding and managing the civil war for the Salvadoran government in late 1980, the Israeli advisers remained. A 1981 report in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, for example, notes the presence of "Israeli advisers . . . training government counterinsurgency troops in El Salvador."[9] Retired Israeli military personnel have also been sent to El Salvador by the government-licensed "security" agencies that have been proliferating in Israel.[10]

The Computer Knows

Israel has also assisted the Salvadoran government in modernizing its intelligence-gathering operations. Rene Francisco Guerra y Guerra, a former colonel now in exile, participated in the 1979 young officer's coup d'etat and served as Deputy Interior Minister in the subsequent government. He recalls that in 1978, Israeli technicians began installing a computer system in San Salvador.[11] While a detailed assessment of this Israeli-supplied system is not available, it can be presumed to be comparable to the computerized intelligence-gathering apparatus Israel has established in Guatemala (see description below). Arnaldo Ramos, a U.S. representative of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), says the system is used to process information taken from Salvadorans stopped at roadblocks in the capital; if a person is found to be too far from his place of employment too often, he is suspected of guerilla activity.[12] This computerized intelligence system is also alleged to monitor phone calls, and water and electric usage in order to assist in the identification of opposition forces in the country.

Other Forms of "Aid"

But the aid that Israel provides to the government of El Salvador is not limited to increasing the prowess of that country's military. Israel has come forward to take on a major role in the long term "pacification" of El Salvador.

After the Salvadoran military failed to succeed in the guerrilla-like tactics advocated by their U.S. advisers, they took the war to the air, systematically bombing the civilian population. The object was to clear the population from the areas under the control of the FMLN. [Although played down by U.S. media, there are literally hundreds of personal reports of these bombings. One told to this author was by Berkeley California Mayor Gus Newport who, on a 1985 trip to visit citizens of Berkeley's sister city, was forced to seek shelter with a

peasant family during a government bombing raid. Also, Rev. James R. Brockman, a Jesuit priest, in a May 30, 1985 letter to the New York Times ("And Yet the Slaughter in El Salvador Goes On,") tells of reports of weekly bombings and follow-up massacres in San Vicente Province.]

Peasants were herded to relocation centers, a situation that was politically untenable over the long term. At that time, the Salvadoran military formulated "Plan 1000" which called for the settlement of 500,000 uprooted peasants in fortified villages. In these fortified villages, it was the intention of the military that, in exchange for food and "protection," the settlers would have to serve in "self defense forces."

When the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) quickly dissociated itself from Plan 1000, the Salvadoran military spoke of soliciting the needed funds from Europe and Latin America.[13]

It was here that Israel stepped in. In February 1986 Israel's ambassador in El Salvador said, "We will be reinforcing our technical cooperation in the agricultural and community development fields, in which we are considered specialists." [Israel was taking on this task out of gratitude for El Salvador's relocation of its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (see below).[14]] Since its inception, Israel has dispensed such agricultural and community development aid abroad. In recent years, however, this aid has acquired a militaristic cast (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of Israeli involvement in Guatemala's pacification project).

On July 2, 1986 it was announced in Israel that Israel and El Salvador had signed an agreement for Israeli technicians to "help El Salvador implement agrarian and industrial schemes," the funding for which was to come from the United States, among others.[15]

Finally, in late July the Salvadoran High Command announced a sweeping counterinsurgency plan involving all the major government ministries. Its aim was to repopulate previously decimated areas. The U.S. Embassy in San Salvador said that Washington would invest more than $18 million in the plan.[17]

Still Another Form of Aid

Israel's assistance to El Salvador's pacification program is only one instance of how its activities have intersected with those of the U.S. At times Israel's input has furthered the aims of the Reagan Administration, at other times it has tended to work at cross purposes to U.S. policy.

On entering office in 1981 President Reagan sought to undo the ban on U.S. aid to El Salvador. Before a reluctant Congress had a chance to debate and vote on his military aid request for El Salvador, the President (with Israeli agreement) "reprogrammed" (in other words diverted) $21 million of U.S. economic aid from Israel to El Salvador.[18]

Israel had been assured of repayment in the following year's U.S. aid package, and presumably the Administration's FY 1983 aid request for Israel took the repayment into account.[19] Ironically, when the request reached the Senate, an amendment adding an additional $15 million was proposed by Alan Cranston (D-CA), a vociferous critic of U.S. intervention in El Salvador.[20]

The Embassy Deal

Israel has also presented itself to certain sectors of the Salvadoran right as an alternative to the U.S. In August 1983, Francisco Jose Guerrero, then chief of staff in the interim administration of President Alvaro Magana, led a delegation to Jerusalem.[21] Guerrero was "Israel's man in El Salvador," often expressing admiration for Israel's expertise at counterinsurgency and resettlement. Throughout 1983 he had been urging that the Salvadoran embassy be moved to Jerusalem so that El Salvador would have an alternative "international backer."[22]

On August 3, 1983, El Salvador and Israel agreed to upgrade their diplomatic ties. Magana's interim government agreed -- at the request of Israeli Foreign

Minister Yitzhak Shamir -- to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Israel in turn announced that it would reopen its embassy in El Salvador, closed since the 1979 killing of honorary consul Liebes.[23]

If this arrangement constituted the entire transaction, the exchange was far from equitable. El Salvador, along with 13 other governments, had moved its embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv in 1980, in protest against the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem. Costa Rica was the only country that had since returned its embassy to Jerusalem. El Salvador's decision to "recognize" -- and thus legitimize -- Jerusalem as Israel's lawful possession was, therefore, of great political value to Israel.

In El Salvador, however, news of the embassy move dismayed many officials. Foreign Minister Fidel Chavez Mena had set a course of improved ties with Middle East nations[24] as part of a larger attempt to avoid becoming wholly dependent upon the United States. El Salvador had previously voted in solidarity with the Palestine Liberation Organization at the UN, but the new arrangement with Israel obliged it to vote in support of Israel.[25] Officials at El Salvador's foreign ministry were astonished, but assumed "that something concrete had been offered in exchange for the transfer, since it contradicted the Foreign Ministry's policy."[26]

Israeli officials had, in fact, expressed their government's desire to provide El Salvador with agricultural aid, while both Salvadoran officials and foreign diplomats in San Salvador anticipated that the embassy exchange would lead to increased Israeli military aid, especially to the internal security forces which the U.S. was barred by law from assisting.[27]

On April 12, 1984, Israeli Ambassador Aryeh Amir presented his credentials in a private ceremony in San Salvador. The following day El Salvador moved its embassy to Jerusalem. When the agreement had thus been carried out, Salvadoran officials again expressed hopes that Israel would increase its military and economic aid: one military source in San Salvador mentioned an $81 million Israeli aid package, including "weapons, military and intelligence advisers and instructors, and assistance in

the field of agriculture."[28] Interim president Magana said a security accord was "an interesting possibility."[29] Israeli officials, for their part, noted that in appreciation for the embassy relocation, Israel would probably increase its "technical assistance" to El Salvador.[30]

The opposition FMLN regarded the embassy move as

> a shameless violation of UN resolutions, and the puppet Magana government has placed itself in a position that opposes that of all the democratic countries in the world, aligning itself with the world's most fascist, warmongering, racist, terrorist and pro-imperialist nation. The decision was imposed on the puppet Magana by Ronald Reagan's imperialist government.[31]

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that "U.S. sources confirm that the administration expects an increase in Israeli aid to El Salvador following the latter's willingness to move its embassy to Jerusalem."[32]

If the embassy move, so controversial and so gratuitous, was neither a down payment on weapons sales nor a dry run for a U.S. embassy move, why did Magana do it? The Salvadoran domestic politics of the period offer a few clues. In August 1983, the Magana interim government knew it had a short lease on life. As it turned out, after the first round of presidential elections on March 25, 1984, Magana's (and Guerrero's) conservative sector of Salvadoran society -- identified with the country's banking and agro-industrial elite -- found itself edged out of national politics. Guerrero, as National Conciliation Party candidate, had been eliminated from the presidential race by finishing behind both Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte and far right Arena Party leader Robert D'Aubuisson.

Many Salvadorans feared (groundlessly, as it turned out) that if Christian Democrat Duarte won the elections scheduled for May, D'Aubuisson forces would stage a coup d'etat.[33] Heightening concern in the Salvadoran business community was an April 4 order by the

U.S. Senate halting aid to El Salvador immediately, should such a coup take place. Democrats in Congress were also stalling a $91 million appropriation for El Salvador.[34]

This background, and the lack of other apparent benefits for El Salvador, leads to the conclusion that President Magana looked on the embassy move simply as a means to ensure Israeli support for his conservative faction in the face of threats from those further right. Magana knew that no such move was available to Duarte, bound as he was to the Christian Democratic position on Jerusalem. The net result of all the maneuvering: the deal with Israel effectively undercut the pressure that the U.S. Senate had intended to put on El Salvador's rightist factions.

Duarte, who won the May election, professed ignorance of the embassy situation: "I still do not know why this decision was adopted," he said.[35] But in his heart he could not have been too distressed. A main feature of the deal cut by Guerrero's delegation to Israeli in 1983 was

> hopes in the Salvadoran government that the influential pro-Israel lobby in the United States will lend a discreet hand in congressional debates over the wisdom of administration policy on Central America and the level of military aid for the U.S.-supported government of provisional President Alvaro Magana.[36]

Conclusion

For over a year Duarte tried to find a middle ground between opening El Salvador's embassy in Jerusalem and offending Israel.[37] Finally, with the war going badly -- and his own political stock falling with the Reagan Administration -- Duarte appointed a permanent ambassador to the Jerusalem mission in January 1986.[38]

Israel reaped political benefit in the embassy episode. At the United Nations, El Salvador now votes

with the U.S. in support of Israel, while its reward comes in the form of Israeli help on its pacification program.

Already bombed out and burned out by the military, disappeared and tortured by the death squads, the Salvadoran people who are forced to live in the strategic hamlets set up under Israeli tutelage will suffer a whole new range of human rights violations.

Chapter 2

GUATEMALA: THE ISRAELI MAINSTAY

> ...for several years Guatemala has used the Galil rifle made in Israel, we cannot think of changing to another type of rifle.[39]

Guatemala bought its first Israeli weapons in 1974 and became more interested in them the following year, when it was threatening to make good on its long-held territorial claim to neighboring Belize with an invasion. Belize at that time was still a British colony, its independence delayed due to fear of Guatemalan encroachment. At the request of the British government, therefore, the Ford Administration postponed shipments of U.S. military equipment to Guatemala.[40]

Angered by the 1975 arms cutoff, Guatemalan leaders were infuriated by the Carter Administration's decision in 1977 to suspend arms shipments to Guatemala because of its consistent violation of its citizens' human rights. Guatemala preempted the cutoff by refusing U.S. arms;[41] since then, with the exception of U.S. arms obtained illegally, it has relied almost entirely on Israel as a source of weapons;[42] of military, intelligence and pacification advice; and of inspiration.

Both foreign observers and Guatemalan military officers have called the ironhanded repression of the Guatemalan Indians "Palestinianization." Mayan Indians constitute a majority of Guatemala's population. Many of the areas where the conflict is most intense have a Mayan majority of more than 85 percent. Not only has Israel replaced the United States as Guatemala's "big brother," but it has made Guatemala impervious to U.S. pressure for reform.

Old Friends

Israel's ties with Guatemala did not begin with arms sales in the 1970's; they go back almost four decades. In 1947 Guatemala's UN representative, Jorge Garcia Granados, was appointed to the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). In Palestine he met such future right-wing leaders as Menachem Begin -- then a leader of the pre-state terrorist underground -- and was instrumental in drafting and securing passage of the partition plan that created the state of Israel. Garcia later became Guatemala's ambassador to Israel.[43]

By 1970 16 Israeli advisers -- 13 agriculturists, 2 engineers, and an educator -- had assisted with Guatemalan projects. Following a 1971 cooperation agreement with Guatemala, Israel established a "workers' bank" and conducted a "youth leadership" course there.[44] Israeli advisers also provided agricultural extension services in Zapaca involving vegetable cultivation and irrigation techniques for cooperatives that had been formed under a short-lived agrarian reform program.[45] Israel still provides agricultural expertise to Guatemala, but recently it's been devoted to the military government's forced resettlement program.

Arms sales had their roots in a 1971 visit to Israel by Kjell Laugerud Garcia, then chief of staff of Guatemala's armed forces. Not long afterward, a fraudulent election raised Laugerud to the Guatemalan presidency, and "he made another private 'pilgrimage' to Israel in April 1974 announcing upon his departure his wish to widen cooperation with Israel."[46]

In the next three years, Guatemala acquired at least 11 Arava aircraft and the Israeli Galil rifle became standard issue for the Guatemalan infantry. Ten RBY armored personnel carriers, three Dabur class patrol boats armed with Gabriel missiles, light cannons, and machineguns, and more than 15,000 Galil assault rifles were also among the early deliveries. Israeli president Ephraim Katzir visited Guatemala in December 1977 -- chiefly to discuss arms and military aid, according to his host, President Laugerud.[47]

The influx of arms continued as the Guatemalan government sought to put down an insurgency that had begun to take hold in the rural highlands, populated almost completely by the country's Mayan Indian majority. In 1982 author Victor Perera visited Guatemala and learned that:

> Uzis and the larger Galil assault rifles used by Guatemala's special counter-insurgency forces accounted for at least half of the estimated 45,000 Guatemalan Indians killed by the military since 1978, when Israel became the chief arms supplier to the first of three consecutive Guatemalan military dictatorships.[48]

By 1983 a reporter for Time noted that:

> In Guatemala, the Israelis have sold the government everything from antiterrorism equipment to transport planes. Army outposts in the jungle have become near replicas of Israeli army field camps. At one such outpost in Huehuetenango, Colonel Gustavo Menendez Herrera points out that his troops are using Israeli communications equipment, mortars, submachine guns, battle gear and helmets. Even the field kitchens were Israeli.[49]

In late 1983 it was learned that the Guatemalan government had a formal agreement with Israel's air force. There have also been reports that Guatemala has obtained

helicopters from Israel and Guatemalan helicopters have been overhauled in Israel.[50]

On March 26, 1986 Greek officials seized and impounded the West Lion, sailing from Israel with a dismantled Augusta Bel 212 helicopter, 209 tons of reinforced TNT, bazookas, machine guns and ammunition. Guatemala was given as the West Lion's first destination.[51]

A 1983 UN General Assembly resolution called for an end to arms sales to Guatemala until there was an improvement in the government's human rights record. Israel, however, continued to sell arms to the military regime; one shipment was made in early 1984, just as the General Assembly reiterated its earlier call.[52] In July 1985, Israel teamed up with the CIA to deliver Guatemala 40 assault rifles with advanced night sights and 1,000 grenade launchers. Delivery was via a KLM flight from Israel.[53]

Counterinsurgency: Electronics

In the autumn of 1981, Israel assisted the government of Romeo Lucas Garcia in setting up an intelligence computer. The machine was supplied by Tadiran, a firm owned by Israel's Histadrut Labor Federation, so it is unlikely that the computer could have been sold to Guatemala against the Israeli government's wishes. This was confirmed by Gen. Benedicto Lucas Garcia, chief of staff during his brother's regime, who told a reporter about a second Israeli computer, set up to serve as "the nerve center of the armed forces.[54]

The intelligence computer was installed in the annex of the National Palace in Guatemala City where, according to Amnesty International, the President and other top government leaders met to select death squad victims.[55] Computerized lists of citizens marked for death are distributed to military commands throughout the country. A Catholic priest who fled the country reported that names of passengers -- including his own -- arriving and departing through Guatemala City's airport were checked against the lists. It is estimated that the

computer now contains data on 80 percent of Guatemala's adult population.[56]

The intelligence computer also has other capabilities:

> Among the new techniques which the computer has made possible have been those learned from Argentine and Chilean advisers. Electricity and water consumption is now being automatically checked in a large number of houses and flats in Guatemala City. Sudden big increases are investigated for the possibility that they occur in guerilla safe houses where bombs or mines are being manufactured. Using this technology, in late 1981 the Guatemalan Army located and raided 30 Guatemala City safe houses of the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms.[57]

In 1981, with $20 million provided by Tadiran, Israeli technicians set up the Escuela de Transmisiones y Electronica del Ejercito, an electronics school for the Guatemalan Army. Israeli instructors teach the students to operate Tadiran field communications equipment, monitor and jam radio transmissions, and possibly to operate the intelligence computer.[58]

Counterinsurgency: Advisers

According to a 1983 Washington Post report, "Israeli advisers -- some official, others private -- helped Guatemalan internal security agents hunt underground rebel groups.[59] The relationship began three years earlier, when Guatemalan Interior Minister Donaldo Alvarez Ruiz visited Israel and received a promise of training for Guatemala's police forces. Israeli military advisers also worked with the recently disbanded Guatemalan secret police, the G-2. Some Guatemalan personnel also have received training in Israel.

In 1984, according to diplomats, between 25 and 40 Israeli citizens were working for Guatemalan intelligence

agencies. A late 1983 report put the total number of Israeli advisers "covering aspects from military electronics to counterinsurgency" at 300.[60]

According to December 1981 reports by the Guardian of London and Israeli human rights activist Israel Shahak, Israeli advisers, along with Argentines and Chileans, have helped Guatemalans refine their torture techniques to keep a victim of interrogation or terror alive as long as possible.[61]

In February 1986 Israeli "advisers" to the mayor of Guatemala City kidnapped, held for several hours and beat up the financial secretary of the municipal workers union (SCTM). The mayor described the thugs as "people of a different nationality who work for the city without a salary,"[62] giving the impression that these Israelis were paid by either the Guatemalan or the Israeli government.

Counterinsurgency: Mopping Up in the "Human Abattoir."[63]

In June 1983, two months before he was toppled from office, Guatemalan head of state Ephrain Rios Montt told the Washington Times that the Israeli government was assisting his government's Techo, tortilla y trabajo counterinsurgency program.[64] A spokesman at Guatemala's Washington embassy added that

> advisers sent by the Israeli government that had been sighted in Guatemala were participating in the programas de repoblacion de zonas conflictivas, . . . [specifically] in repopulation and readjustment programs of displaced persons in their original areas.[65]

Techo, tortilla y trabajo and the earlier fusiles y frijoles (literally "guns and beans," usually interpreted as "if you're with us you eat, if you're not we shoot you") were the mopping up phase of the Guatemalan Armed Forces' Plan Victoria 1982. Designed to crush all resistance to the government, Plan Victoria was carried out with Israeli weapons during 1982 and 1983.[66]

"In a policy of deliberate extermination," according to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation report, "the government bombed and burned entire villages." They then pursued the people on the ground -- shooting, hanging, strangling, and torturing them, raping and knifing the women, smashing the children. At least 10,000 Guatemalan Indians died, a million became internal refugees, and as many as 100,000 fled to Mexico, in a carnage which one U.S. diplomat called "the Government's genocide against the Indians," citing "atrocities" which he said "make the Sabra and Shatilla massacres in Beirut pale by comparison." The armed forces left the people of the highlands paralyzed with fear.[67]

Israel, said Gen. Lucas Garcia, "was the only country that gave us military support in our battle against the guerrillas."[68]

Gen. Oscar Mejia Victores, who ousted Rios Montt on August 8, 1983, continued Techo, tortilla y trabajo, and Israeli advisers remained involved in the program. Although repression in the cities has lessened to some extent since the election of Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo in January of 1986, the merciless "pacification" of the countryside continues under total control of the military.

Techo, tortilla y trabajo, now well along in implementation, calls for rounding up and resettling the peasants dislocated by the military into closed, fortified aldeas estrategicas (strategic villages), where work is assigned and payment is in food. Arranged in "poles of development," these settlements are sometimes called aldeas modelas (model villages), and sometimes concentration camps.[69]

> In short, a population that once was scattered over a large expanse is now concentrated in communities that can be easily guarded and controlled. . . . All town residents queried out of hearing of army civic-action teams said they were forbidden to leave. . . . "The army says we have to remain here," said a 30-year--old man . . . "If anyone tries to leave here, they kill him."[70]

During the first six weeks of Mejia's rule, "at least 18,000 people were confined in strategic villages."[71]

Often a six-month term in a political re-education center precedes resettlement in a model village. To receive food -- often this is donated by UNICEF, CARE, and USAID, and sometimes by such U.S. Christian fundamentalist organizations as the Christian Broadcasting Network -- a peasant must submit to the military's program. Re-education need not end with resettlement. One group of 1,000 Kekchi Indians, who had been placed in a major military reindoctrination center by the military district commander, were to continue their "reeducation and liberation from Marxist influence" in their new villages. To refuse reindoctrination means death.[72]

Many of the Guatemalan military officers who run the resettlement program have been trained in Israel. They say they are adapting the Israeli kibbutz model to Guatemalan circumstances, but the Guatemalan version -- even though the term "communitarianism" is used to describe it -- is a travesty of the Israeli kibbutz, where everyone is expected to work and share equally in the decisionmaking.[73]

What actually happened is that the military, with Israeli advice, reworked a short-lived cooperative concept introduced during the 1970s by progressive missionaries.[74] However, the underlying principle in today's model villages is to prevent the formation of any indigenous leadership:

> the military or military-appointed commissioners control everything from latrine installation to food distribution.[75]

So far, one million dollars of USAID funds,[76] stretched by the forced labor of the inhabitants, have been used to build the infrastructure for these villages.[77] To make the villages profitable over the long term, however, the Guatemalan officers (who will certainly be reaping the profits) are seeking $300 million. Their plan, inspired by their Israeli mentors,[78] is to set up the model villages as vertically-integrated producers of

specialty cash crops -- frozen broccoli, snow peas, cut flowers. They have repeatedly attempted to secure additional U.S. funding for these projects. Already, there have been reports that the captive Indians are not allowed to grow sufficient food for themselves.[79]

Counterinsurgency: The Civil Patrols

The resettlement program has done tremendous damage to the cultural integrity of the Mayan peoples, whose greatest attachment was to ancestral lands and the family hearth. "Previous systems of settling disputes and selecting leaders have no meaning in this context," concluded an Americas Watch report.[80]

According to anthropologist and Guatemala expert Beatriz Manz, this disruption of tradition, and the substitution of reward-for-performance for respect for age and religious service, are "institutionalized and alien." In the new villages the women are forced to cook communally and the men forced to join "civil defense patrols,"[81] a duty which sometimes involves executing friends and relatives.[82]

In June 1984 Guatemala's Archbishop, Prospero Penados del Barrio, called a press conference to express opposition to the civil patrols, calling on the military government to "substantially modify" them.[83]

In late December 1983 a shipment of Israeli arms destined for Guatemala was detained in Florida. Requesting release of the shipment, head of state Mejia Victores said that the obsolete rifles on board were purchased for "training." However, Mejia's predecessor, Rios Montt, had sought the rifles for the civil defense patrols.[84]

Counterinsurgency: Palestinianization

"The Israeli soldier is a model and an example to us," as Gen. Benedicto Lucas Garcia put it[85] -- and Israel is an inspiration to the Guatemalan government in more than just military matters. When, in 1983, Guatemalan military officers spoke of the "Palestinianization of the

Indians,"[86] they were talking about their efforts to bring the Mayan Indian majority under permanent control, looking for an example to Israel's long-term occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights.

The parallels between the Israeli occupation and the Guatemalan armed forces' occupation of the Indian highlands are many. One striking similarity appears in the attitudes of the occupying forces towards the occupied. In Guatemala, the "government has labeled a large portion of the population 'non-people'. . . in a policy of deliberate extermination."[87] And, although for external consumption the Guatemalan government claims that its victims are "Communist subversives," it has often been noted that among conservative Guatemalans, "fear of the Indian is at least as strong as fear of Communists."[88] The very fury with which the Guatemalan military has savaged the highlands gives credence to claims that Guatemala's leaders wish to reduce the Indian population to a minority.[89] Similarly, the Israeli Army's approach to the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories embodies the attitude of the Israeli general who referred to them as "drugged roaches crawling in a bottle."

The methods of occupation also echo one another. For Palestinians as for Mayans, the least resistance, even the slightest flicker of hostility toward the occupiers, is harshly punished. The punishment is often collective -- a block of houses bulldozed in Gaza, a village burned to the ground in the Guatemalan highlands.

For both occupying regimes, maintaining control over the male population is of paramount concern. Compulsory civil patrol duty, assigned unpaid work, ubiquitous government informers, and especially the co-optation of traditional indigenous leadership by the military authorities accomplish this in Guatemala. Numerous Israeli practices -- repeated jailings, house and town arrests, repeated closures of West Bank universities, use of work and residence permits to exclude large numbers of the educated, and the notorious Village Leagues (Palestinian collaborators armed and maintained by Israel) -- produce comparable results.[90]

Destruction of the local economy offers a further parallel between the occupied Guatemalan highlands and

Israeli-occupied territories. Restrictive labor practices guarantee that Palestinians have little access to decent employment. Israel expropriates Palestinian land, denies access to water, and denies permits to plant or build, while inundating local markets with Israeli goods. By these and other measures, many Palestinians are deprived of any alternative to hiring themselves out as cheap, manual labor.

In Guatemala the military sweeps and the destruction of villages have forced the indigenous people off their land.[91] A rigid military pass system binds the peasant to the model village. Moreover, forced labor and civil patrol duty, which can be as frequent as twice a week,

> erect numerous obstacles to all economic activity. . . . When they migrate to work on the plantations [a yearly practice to supplement incomes], men or their wives must find a replacement for patrol duty . . . and the men often are required to bring back a "receipt" from the plantation owner . . . verifying their whereabouts. This can create pressure on a peasant to accept any wage rather than return home . . . without any receipt. . . . the continual stopping, document checking, destination checking, permission getting, and scheduled check-ins with civilian patrols represent an enormous impediment to rural marketing and commercial distribution, effectively smothering the indigenous merchant class that had once represented an alternative to migrant labor for the highland Indians.[92]

Both Israeli and Guatemalan repression share two U.S. connections: both have been financed by U.S. foreign aid (although in the case of Guatemala, Congressional opponents of the resettlement program have in the past blocked appropriations for that use); and both are spoken of very little in the United States.

Even today, after the transfer to an elected government, it is not certain that if Guatemala had to choose between returning to U.S. tutelage or continuing to rely on Israel for military support, it would not opt for Israel. As a leading Guatemalan rightist once told Reuters: "The Israelis do not let this human rights thing stand in the way of business. You pay, they deliver. No questions asked, unlike the gringos."[93]

When the Carter White House stopped arms shipments to Guatemala in 1977, it probably did not anticipate that Israeli backing would entrench the very system the aid cutoff was intended to modify. Israel, however, has a vested interest in maintaining the influence of the military leaders to whom it has ties. Before the transfer to civilian rule, Guatemala said that except for a few helicopter parts, it did not need the U.S. arms which President Reagan has worked so hard to push through Congress.[94] Now, under President Cerezo, it remains aloof.

In the last few years, the Guatemalan government has felt sufficiently emancipated from U.S. patronage to refuse participation in the revival of CONDECA, a regional military alliance the Reagan Administration hoped to use against Nicaragua. Even though the dominant Guatemalan military is devoutly anti-Communist, both under military rule and under the Cerezo administration, Guatemala has supported the Contadora peace effort and opposed U.S. aid to the contras.[95]

Angered by the 1977 arms cutoff, Guatemalan officials were further disappointed by Ronald Reagan's failure to turn his often-stated sympathy for Guatemala into U.S. policy. Guatemalan leaders' image of the United States had to have been influenced by the totalitarian system the U.S. imposed and nurtured after the CIA toppled Guatemala's elected government in 1954. They now see the United States as fickle and unreliable.

"There are so many different political sectors in the United States Government . . . that it is a nightmare to deal with them," remarked Guatemalan Foreign Minister Fernando Andrade Diaz-Duran after a May 1984 visit to

Washington. The same year he told a gathering in Guatemala of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Central America and Panama that U.S. policy toward Guatemala was "not equitable and praised Israel's friendship and cooperation."[96]

Politically In Tune

As Israel has sought to make itself indispensible to Guatemala, Israeli operatives -- military advisers, salesmen, technicians -- have become firmly ensconced throughout Guatemala's political and economic system. It is also, of course, in the Israeli interest to protect and foster the careers of Guatemalan officials who have a record of patronage of Israeli arms and services -- although Israeli statements have not stressed this factor. Protecting "the personal safety of the leaders of some countries" is one of the only roles the Israeli government has ever acknowledged its agents perform.[97]

However, Pesakh Ben-Or, the owner of Eagle Military Gear Overseas (see above) made a $10,000 donation to the electoral campaign of Jorge Carpio Nicolle, the runner-up in the election, who became vice president.[98] And, soon after the newly elected president, Vinicio Cerezo, was sworn in, Guatemala's defense minister announced that the Israeli ambassador had "offered military cooperation to Guatemala."[99]

Israeli advisers have been credited with assisting in at least one Guatemalan coup d'etat: Rios Montt told an ABC reporter that his March 1982 takeover succeeded "because many of our soldiers were trained by Israelis." It was an Israeli adviser who smuggled the fallen Rios Montt out of Guatemala to Miami in August 1983. And in the recent Guatemalan elections, Israelis were seen staffing security positions at the election night press center.[100]

Israeli technicians set up an arms factory for the Guatemalan military in the town of Coban in Alta Verapaz department, and Eagle Military Gear Overseas, an Israeli arms firm headquartered in the Cortijo Reforma Hotel in Guatemala City, invested in the plant. Initially the plant was intended to produce ammunition, but its capacity

was soon expanded: it now produces armor plating for vehicles and turns out replacement parts for Galil rifles. According to the head of army public relations, the factory could produce grenade launchers, too. And according to former commander-in-chief Gen. Benedicto Lucas Garcia, the Israelis trained his men to operate the factory.[101]

Israeli technicians run the radar at Guatemala's main airport, and others help government bureaucracies computerize. And, following a cultural exchange agreement, Israeli Spanish language programs air on Guatemalan radio.[102] According to a 1984 tourism agreement, travel to Guatemala is to be promoted in the New York, Miami, and Los Angeles Jewish communities. Most U.S. travel agents boycott Guatemala.[105]

Political ties between the two countries also are close. Only an economic crisis prevented head of state Mejia Victores from making a scheduled visit to Israel in April 1985, and he quickly rescheduled the trip for January 1986.[106]

Although Guatemala has not moved its Israel embassy back to Jerusalem, it did not abandon Jerusalem for Tel Aviv until 1980, and then only under considerable pressure from Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, important customers for its cardomon crop. However, according to Dr. Israel Shahak, Guatemala still has an active office in Jerusalem. During the elections, the candidate of the violent far right, Mario Sandoval, promised that if he were elected president in November 1985, he would return the embassy to Jerusalem.[109]

Guatemala has been a strong supporter of Israel in the United Nations. In late 1984, it abstained from voting on a resolution against Israeli collaboration with South Africa. (It was later determined that the Guatemalan military had developed its own ties with South Africa, a major ally of Israel's, which has sent advisers to help in its pacification program.[106])

Israeli investment in Guatemala increased after a Trade and Economic Cooperation agreement was concluded during a 1982 visit to Israel by the Guatemalan Minister of Economics. Guatemalan journalists in exile have

recently documented greatly increased Israeli and U.S. investment as well as stepped-up Israeli military assistance.[107] Besides Eagle Military Gear Overseas, Tadiran Electronics, and the Israeli involvement in commercial aspects of the resettlement program, the Israeli company Tahal Consulting Engineers, which works on water purification, land reclamation, and irrigation, has registered to operate in Guatemala.[108]

Comfort For Congress

The only thing Guatemala really needs from the United States is money to steady its faltering economy and to move ahead on its $300 million pacification program. Before the transfer to civilian rule, a bipartisan coalition in the House of Representatives cut the President's requested $10 million for military assistance to Guatemala to a $300,000 training grant and put a string of conditions on $58 million in economic aid for 1986 and 1987. These conditions required Presidential certification that Guatemala's violations of human rights have decreased and that civilians are in control of the government, hardly an insurmountable obstacle under the current Administration. The conditions also forbid spending U.S. aid on the resettlement program.[109]

The human rights situation, especially in the countryside, has not showed substantial improvement under the Cerezo government and Guatemala solidarity activists fear that U.S. aid to Guatemala will result in the acceleration of the incorporation of the rural population into model villages.[110] The Guatemalan military -- through an elaborate parallel administration scheme promulgated shortly before the 1985 presidential elections -- continues to control the pacification program.[111] Activists concerned about the situation in Guatemala also point out that the use of U.S. funds for schools and hospitals releases other money for expenditure on the model villages.

Chapter 3

NICARAGUA 1978-79: THE ISRAELI DEFENDER

Had the Sandinistas failed in their attempt to rid Nicaragua of the dictator Anastasio Somoza, Nicaraguans might now be living under an iron terror comparable to that suffered by Guatemala's Indians -- and with the same Israeli connection. Israel became Nicaragua's principal arms provider at the same time it became Guatemala's, and for the same reason. In September 1978, the Carter Administration halted U.S. aid to the Somoza government because of its abysmal human rights record. And although Somoza was vanquished in July 1979, after virtually the entire population rose up against him, Israel's connection with the dictator's abhorred Guardia Nacional -- living today as the anti-Nicaragua "contra" mercenaries -- continues to be an important element in current history.

The relationship between Israel and the Somoza family is older than the state of Israel itself. During the late 1930s -- for a very handsome price -- the first Somoza dictator (father of the one ousted in 1979) provided cover for arms purchases made in Europe by the underground Haganah, the pre-state forerunner of the Israeli army. After World War II, Somoza provided Haganah buyers diplomatic cover and signed arms receipts for their purchases. In that deal, the Haganah provided cash, in

excess of $200,000, in advance and deposited it in the dictator's personal New York bank account. They added to this a large diamond and other gifts.[112]

As time passed, the roles reversed: it was Israel that provided arms to the Somozas. Anastasio Somoza (the son) bought Dabur class patrol boats and Arava STOL aircraft; ultimately he owned 14 Aravas, which his army used for moving troops from one battle to another. By 1974 he was considered such a good customer that a display of Israeli arms was arranged for his convenience in Managua.[113]

Israel enjoyed the Somozas' steadfast political support. During their reign Nicaragua cast more UN votes in favor of Israel than did the United States.[114]

In 1978 the relationship reached a peak: the very survival of the Somoza dictatorship became dependent on Israeli arms. By September of that year, there was resistance to Somoza in most of Nicaragua's cities. "The guerrillas rely on overwhelming popular support," wrote onecorrespondent from Managua of the FSLN (the Sandinista National Liberation Front). Strengthening the insurrection was an 80 percent effective general strike in Managua which had the support of the entire business community.

With his U.S. arms supplies curtailed because of human rights abuses, Somoza relied on Israel to maintain his superior firepower. The Guardia Nacional had about 1,000 Uzi submachine guns and Galil assault rifles. Somoza was expecting "thousands more" of the Galils.[115]

His hopes were justified in early autumn by the arrival of large quantities of Israeli rifles and ammunition. Some of the Galils were "sent directly to a special terror unit commanded by Somoza's son, which carried out the murder of political opponents, among them women and children." The early autumn shipment was also in time for the Guardia Nacional to use in its October 1978 "clean-up" operations in half a dozen cities. The Guardia Nacional's vengeance took victims in every social sector, but the majority of those shot at their own front doors were poor people between 14 and 21 years old. They were selected for execution, according to a November 1978 report from the Organization of American States (OAS),

"only because they lived in districts where members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front had been active."[116]

By November 19, the Guardia Nacional had "received several secret arms shipments from Israel which were delivered by air at night during curfew hours." This set of deliveries contained surface-to-air missiles for use against the earthbound Sandinistas. The Israeli government, which had pledged to stop the arms shipments, denied that they were occurring, but U.S. officials attested to their arrival. Said one, "Our people in Managua tell us that the streets are starting to look like Jerusalem because the National Guard is wearing Israeli berets."[117]

As Somoza became increasingly desperate, he became increasingly ruthless. "The longer the war continues," wrote New York Times reporter Alan Riding, "the more brutal it becomes. The Government is dropping 500-pound bombs from helicopters on rebel-held shantytowns, reportedly killing as many as 600 people in one day. Soldiers routinely kill suspected rebels they capture."[118]

"One hears countless stories of tiny slum homes demolished by government bombs, and infants torn to pieces by fragmentation rockets," wrote Karen DeYoung of the Washington Post. A Red Cross estimate put the number of refugees in Managua alone at 50,000.[119]

The shipments continued. Through the first half of 1979, the dictator was drawing 98 percent of his military supplies[120] -- an estimated $250 million worth -- from Israel.[121]

According to one report Israel provided Somoza with nine combat-armed Cessnas (seven of which the FSLN eventually shot down). On June 23 two Sikorsky helicopters arrived from Israel. Flown at 3,000 feet, the helicopters were used as platforms for machinegun strafing and for dropping 250- and 500-pound bombs on the population.[122]

During those final months, as the Somoza dynasty staggered on through blood and rubble, Israel's crucial arms sales to his regime were widely criticized. Typical was the sentiment expressed by Costa Rica's conservative

daily La Republica: "the whole world should join in asking Israel to stop sending weapons of aggression, oppression and death. . . . "[123]

To Nicaraguans, Israel's support of Somoza was a matter of urgency and outrage. The Managua daily La Prensa editorialized that Prime Minister Begin's Nobel Peace Prize was tainted by his government's arms sales to the government of Anastasio Somoza. Countries that helped the Somoza regime, said La Prensa, "as Israel has been doing [are] like accomplices in genocide."[124] The successor government of Nicaragua, when it reluctantly agreed to assume Somoza's debts (to do otherwise would have been to preclude the possibility of further loans), nevertheless repudiated the debt remaining to Israel.[125] The debt was small, however, as Israel had generally required cash in advance.

The last Israeli shipment to reach Somoza, two weeks before he fled the country, contained mortars as well as small arms ammunition.[126] A more crucial cargo didn't make it. In July 1979, a shipload of weapons from Israel was turned back only miles from Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. According to Somoza, the arms

> had been paid for before the ship ever left Israel. . . . That ship carried, among other military items, ten thousand anti-tank and anti-personnel grenade rifles with ammunition. . . . That precious cargo could have won the war for the anti-Communist forces of Nicaragua. . . . Somewhere in Israel there is a large consignment of arms and ammunition which could have saved Nicaragua.[127]

On July 19, Somoza fled the country, after cleaning out the national treasury. He left behind him 800,000 people in need of daily food, five cities bombed to rubble, and the nation's industry virtually destroyed.[128] It is said that almost every Nicaraguan family was bereaved.

None So Blind

What was the United States, specifically the human rights-oriented Carter Administration and the Congress that supported the Administration's human rights policies doing while its ally Israel ignored its arms embargo?

"The Carter Administration monitors and allows such shipments because it wants to avoid an armed overthrow of Somoza while forcing him to resign," according to a State Department spokesman in 1978.[129]

The Department's explanation came in response to questions from reporters prompted by a plea from Nicaraguans. The previous month, a representative of Nicaragua's Broad Opposition Front had gone to Washington specifically to request that the Carter administration call a halt to Israeli arms shipments to Somoza. The Carter position at that time was "against trying to prevent Israel from supplying light arms . . . to Somoza [fearing that] without new weapons and ammunition, Somoza and his National Guard might be quickly routed by Sandinista guerillas." Hoping that "a moderate element would emerge" to seize control, the Carter Administration said that it might in the future pressure Israel to stop its arms sales to Somoza.[130]

Although the fighting in Nicaragua continued to make the news almost every day, this exchange was the extent of U.S. interest in Israel's role as a prop to Somoza. Nothing in the Congressional Record, no avalanche of op-ed pieces or letters to the editor suggested any disagreement with this policy by members of Congress or other recognized leaders.

Chapter 4

NICARAGUA 1979-86: ISRAEL AND THE CONTRAS

In 1979, former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan wrote to [Defense Minister] Ezer Weizman warning him of the disastrous effect on Israeli foreign relations if an Israeli arms industry representative were to be found lying dead next to Somoza in his own bunker.[131] His apprehension was not a fanciful one: one Israeli adviser "who presented himself as an Israeli army officer" was reportedly with Somoza in his Managua bunker. He allegedly represented David Marcos Katz, a major Israeli arms dealer based in Mexico City who had ties to the Israeli far right, particularly to the settlers movement Gush Emunim.[132] Dayan's prediction was never put to the test, however, for Somoza escaped, to be hunted down and shot in Paraguay. No one knows whether the Israeli adviser fled or died. Rather than an uproar, silence has continued to shroud the role Israel played in extending the tenure of Somoza.

Since Somoza's overthrow, Israel and some of its U.S. supporters have continued to pursue a policy, based on perceived political and economic interests, of unrelenting hostility to the Sandinistas. The policy takes two major forms: an attempt to convince the U.S. public that the Nicaraguan government is anti-Semitic; and

provision of a continuing supply of weapons to the contra mercenaries who are trying to overthrow that government.

In Israel a powerful lobby wants to increase arms sales -- to the contras as well as to other customers -- without regard to the political consequences; some Israelis also favor a higher Israeli profile on behalf of the Reagan Administration in Central America. In 1986, "Israeli diplomats discreetly encouraged American Jewish bodies" to lobby Congress in favor of contra aid.[133]

Right-wing Jewish organizations in the United States share these positions as part of their general political outlook. These organizations, most prominent among them the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith, are working to swing the U.S. Jewish community into the right-wing camp.

The ADL has stated on numerous occasions that Israel's long-term interests lie with the pro-defense, anti-Communist rightist forces in the United States. The conservative Jewish groups distrust liberal support for Israel, fearing that liberals, in their zeal for disarmament, might become reluctant to support Israel's ever-rising U.S. military aid.

Similarly, the right-wing Jewish organizations have sought alliances on Israel's behalf with the conservative Christian fundamentalists. Pat Robertson, for instance, is a close friend of Israeli officials. These Jewish organizations reject links with mainline Protestant denominations because, unlike conservative Christian fundamentalists, they have occasionally taken positions in favor of a more balanced U.S. Middle East policy and have voiced concern for the oppression of Palestinians living under Israeli rule.

With reference to Nicaragua, the Jewish right has joined its voice with the call of the Reaganites for war against Nicaragua, particularly seeking Jewish support for that call. In March 1986, as President Reagan launched a frenetic campaign to win Congressional approval of contra aid, Kenneth Bialkin, then chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations (as well as head of the ADL) led a Jewish delegation to the White House and told the President, that while he could not speak for all

American Jews concerning the contras, "I believe that the overwhelming sympathy and support of the American Jewish community rides with freedom . . . and would support you in your interested and objective and principled effort in that area."

Also in March, the names of a number of well-known Jewish neo-conservatives were listed as signers of full page ads in the Washington Post and the New York Times, supporting the President's request for contra aid.[134] Meanwhile the far right National Jewish Coalition also threw its weight behind contra aid.[135]

Since Somoza fled Nicaragua, these right-wing groups have kept up a steady barrage on two fronts: to stigmatize Nicaragua as an outpost of "PLO terrorism;" and to brand the Nicaragua government as "anti-Semitic." Since 1982, they have been promulgating these two positions as protective fire to cover Israel's re-entry into the war against Nicaragua.

For its part, the present Nicaraguan government maintained normal diplomatic relations with Israel for the first three years of its tenure. In August 1982, in protest against Israel's invasion of Lebanon, it broke off relations with Israel.

In 1980 Nicaragua exchanged ambassadors with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). In this relationship, Nicaragua was no different than many other countries which have formal relations with the PLO.

Nicaragua has benefited from the connection in very practical and unsensational ways. The PLO, which sends a considerable number of technical experts to developing countries, has participated in the rebuilding of the devastated Nicaraguan economy Somoza left behind. According to Zehdi Terzi, the PLO's Permanent Representative to the UN, "We have a great number of experts there -- a lot of agricultural engineers, a few doctors, and civil aviation pilots."[136]

In the United States, however, the normal and constructive links between Nicaragua and the PLO have been forged into a formidable weapon to destroy sympathy for Nicaragua. In January 1985, with Congress due to vote on

aid for the contras, President Reagan found it useful to rail against a "subversion that violates international law," namely, a "new danger we see in Central America . . . the support being given to the Sandinistas by Colonel Qaddafi's Libya, the PLO and, most recently, the Ayatollah Khomeini."[137]

The PLO connection was not the only new danger on this list. Although Libya would like to send troops to Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan government will accept none, while Nicaragua's arrangement with Iran involves an oil-for-sugar barter.[138]

Whenever it has urged Israel to become more active in Central America, the Reagan Administration has cited the opportunity such activity would give Israel to fight the PLO there.[139] The Israeli government has in fact been deeply concerned about the warm reception given the PLO throughout Latin America. In 1981 it compiled and circulated in Latin America a document intended to discourage diplomatic recognition of the PLO. Jewish rightists in the U.S. have repeatedly used this document to foment hostility toward Nicaragua.[140]

The facts and logic in the document are of doubtful value. A copy obtained from a White House briefing, with "White House Digest" as its masterhead, is entitled "The PLO in Central America." Inside, a crude picture of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat is surrounded by tiny bubbles, each containing the name of a "terrorist" or "guerilla" organization. The caption reads, "Intelligence information has linked the PLO with terrorist and guerilla organizations around the world." Among the organizations mentioned are some long-disbanded groups and others which are recognized political parties.

Regardless of the quality of its contents, however, the document has been distributed to "scholars," State Department experts, and countless Jewish organizations, many of whom have recycled it into the mainstream media. The White House, for example, passed it out at the above-mentioned briefing -- held on July 20, 1983, for leaders of Jewish organizations -- one of a series organized by the White House Public Liaison Office to rally special interest groups to its anti-Nicaragua policy.[141]

That same White House briefing bears special note since it marked the debut of charges of Sandinista anti-Semitism. The charges were raised by Rabbi Morton Rosenthal, ADL director for Latin American affairs. Rosenthal's case against the Nicaraguan government was based on complaints by two Jewish businessmen that their property had been expropriated and one had been briefly jailed. There was also the matter of the Managua synagogue, which during the fighting of 1978 had been hit with a Molotov cocktail and defaced with the slogan "arms-selling Jew rats."[142]

Rosenthal accused the Nicaraguan government of seizing the synagogue, but all other parties involved in the dispute have pointed out that Nicaragua's diminutive Jewish community had dwindled to the point where there were no longer enough people to support a place of worship. The Nicaraguan government had taken over the synagogue only when the congregation abandoned it; repeated attempts to return it to the remaining Nicaraguan Jewish community have found no takers.[143]

Rosenthal's other charges had no firmer foundation. One of his persecuted businessmen was Abraham Gorn, the president of the Nicaraguan Jewish community, soon to be exposed as a close associate of Somoza.

In fact, so baseless were Rosenthal's charges that, after a telegram from the U.S. ambassador in Managua denied the existence of anti-Semitism in Nicaragua, the Reagan Administration removed several paragraphs based on the charges from the White House Digest prepared for the July 20, 1983 briefing. The President, however, read the expunged charges as part of his prepared remarks, and Rosenthal was careful to report the President's words to the press.[144]

Moreover, the ADL was able to use press reports of the President's statements to convince at least one Congressional liberal, Michael Barnes (D-MD) to accuse Nicaragua of the preposterous charge of having "forced exile by your government of the entire Jewish community."[145]

ADL charges of anti-Semitism have struck a resonant chord on the conservative as well as the liberal

side of Congress. On June 16, 1985, Rep. Robert Lagomarsino (R-CA) inserted into the Congressional Record an interview with Nicaragua's Foreign Minister, Miguel d'Escoto, by an otherwise unidentified "Arabic periodical." Lagomarsino cited D'Escoto's warnings in the interview of the dangers of Israel's military role in Central America as evidence of "the increasingly anti-Jewish nature of the Nicaraguan regime."[146]

Mistrust

The ADL is doing its best to keep alive the notion of Sandinista anti-Semitism. In May 1986, just before a crucial vote on contra aid, the ADL circulated its "white paper" on Nicaraguan "anti-Semitism" to members of Congress. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the charges of anti- Semitism have been repeatedly discredited by other Jewish groups. Several years ago the World Jewish Congress released a report by Rabbi Heszel Klepfisz, chief rabbi of Panama, whose trip to Nicaragua revealed anti-Israel, but not anti-Semitic sentiments. These findings were echoed by Rabbi Balfour Brickner of the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York and Sol Sorrin, executive director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council, among many others.[147]

One attempt at reconciliation ended by driving the wedge between Israel and Nicaragua even deeper. Claiming a desire to achieve some distance from the ADL vendetta against Nicaragua, Edgar Bronfman, World Jewish Congress President, entered the controversy. Bronfman, who frequently negotiates with foreign governments on Israel's behalf, met several times with Daniel Ortega, hosting him at a dinner in New York and then traveling to Nicaragua for further discussions.[148] In the end, however, he confronted Nicaragua with a demand: "if Nicaragua were to vote against the next UN resolution which contains language condemning Zionism as racism . . . the Jewish community would view that as a positive signal." The Jerusalem Post reported that Ortega was "prepared to do so."[149]

Nicaragua, however, voted in favor of allowing debate in the General Assembly on an Iranian resolution which proposed to exclude Israel from the world body. On

that basis, Israel quickly judged that Ortega had been insincere. Although a spokesman at Nicaragua's London embassy tried to explain the distinction between a vote for debate and a vote to exclude Israel, supporters of Israel were not convinced.[150]

Following the September 1984 formation in Israel of a Labor-Likud "Unity" government, headed by Shimon Peres, Nicaragua was especially eager to improve relations with Israel.[151] Nicaraguan leaders hoped that Peres, whose Labor Party (Mapai) is Israel's official representative in the Socialist International, would follow that organization's general policy, which has been to support the Nicaraguan government against U.S. attacks. This hope, together with speculation that Peres would reverse Israel's hawkish policies in Central America, proved groundless.

While the Labor Party shunned Nicaragua's approaches to Israel through the Socialist International, however, the Mapam party accepted an official invitation to visit Nicaragua.[152] A Zionist and Socialist party, Mapam has observer status in the Socialist International. At the time it was invited to visit Nicaragua, it was just severing its long parliamentary alliance with the Labor Party, having chosen to join the opposition rather than participate in a coalition government with the Likud bloc.

The four-person Mapam delegation that visited Nicaragua in October 1984 was the first Israeli delegation to set foot there since the 1979 triumph. The delegation met with a number of government figures and returned home with Nicaragua's promise to "reassess" its relations with Israel. They also heard Nicaraguan leaders express concern over Israeli aid to the contras.[153] [Mapam efforts continue and it has announced that it will be hosting a Nicaraguan delegation in early 1987.[154]]

In Israel, even after the FSLN became part of the new government of Nicaragua, propaganda continues to depict it as a terrorist organization, linked to the PLO.[155] In June 1986 Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir said Nicaragua was part of "an international monster spread over continents." Shamir congratulated the Reagan Administration on its "anti-terror" war in South (sic)

America and said "Israel favors cooperation for the suppression of terror."[156]

Through all this Israel has been quietly increasing its support for the contras.

First Reports

During the early part of 1983, rumors began to circulate that Israel was supplying weapons to the contras. A member of Israel's Knesset, Yair Tzaban (Mapam) believes that, in fact, the process was set in motion during a 1982 visit to Honduras by then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. At that time Sharon met with the leaders (former Somoza Guardia Nacional officers) of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front (FDN).[157]

In the spring of 1983, the contras began claiming that Israel might take over their logistics, should Congress bar the Reagan Administration from continuing to direct their operations. If they would continue to get support anyway, why should the U.S. government abandon its chance to influence them? The first report that Israel was involved came from ABC Television, which noted the involvement of Venezuela and Brazil as well.[158]

Then, in July 1983, the Reagan Administration announced that Israel was shipping artillery pieces, mortar rounds, mines, hand grenades, and ammunition to Honduras "for eventual use by the contras." That month Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE) leader Eden Pastora, based in Costa Rica, received 500 AK-47 rifles from Israel. [ARDE was disbanded in 1986.] In October 1983, the Honduras-based FDN received 2,000 AK-47's. The CIA paid Israel for these arms, which Israel had captured in Lebanon.[159]

The following spring, as the Reagan Administration faced almost certain Congressional rejection of its request for funds for the contras, the mercenaries acknowledged receipt of the Israeli arms. On April 23, 1984, FDN commander Enrique Bermudez told NBC Nightly News, "We have received some weapons . . . the . . . Israeli government took from PLO in Lebanon."[160]

Other reports of Israeli involvement with the contras also surfaced. It was mentioned in one report that Israeli advisers, "retired or reserve Israeli army commandos . . . hired by shadowy private firms," were getting $6,500 to $10,000 a month to whip the contras into shape.[161] A later report in the Guardian of London said that Israeli advisers to the contras were assigned by the Israeli Defense Forces and used IDF manuals and catalogs in their work.[162]

Israeli officials denied these reports of Israeli support for the contras and the Israeli government radio took the position that the statements by the contras and the Administration were "an American tactic to link Israel with Reagan administration policies." David Kimche, the director-general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, suggested that the contras were trying to capitalize on Israel's popularity in Congress.[163]

In addition to claiming aid from Israel, ARDE officials spoke of receiving financial aid from Jewish sources in the United States. As early as September 1983, the organization's political chief, Alfonso Robelo, claimed to have received donations from "some Jewish groups." The following year he said that ARDE would be able to continue fighting because of "the help we have received from democrats in Venezuela and Mexico, Nicaraguan exiles, and the Jewish communities of the United States." Interviewed in Madrid in September 1984 by the Spanish News Agency, Robelo said that ARDE was "receiving help from many democrats and private companies in France, Spain, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia and even Jews."[166]

As Congress continued to refuse funding for the contras, further reports emerged about alternative sources of aid reaching the anti-Nicaragua rebels. In September 1984, U.S. officials told the New York Times that the contras had "received official and private aid from Israel, Taiwan, Guatemala and El Salvador." A later statement put a $10 million figure on aid coming from all those sources. The money, according to Reagan Administration and contra sources, had been collected in six months, and official aid from Israel accounted for half of the amount. In January 1985 Reagan Administration officials disclosed that "Israeli shipments of rifles,

grenades and ammunition to the rebels had picked up since last summer when United States aid began to run out."[165]

The results of increasing Israeli aid began to be evident on the ground. The contras, reported Business Week, had plenty of funds to stage raids across the Honduran border into Nicaragua, "using money and equipment supplied by governments that are big recipients of U.S. aid -- such as Honduras, El Salvador, and Israel."[166]

That spring, Nicaraguan soldiers and militia members reported capturing numerous Israeli weapons -- Galil rifles for the most part -- and finding Israeli-made uniforms on the contras they killed or captured. A display in Managua included new Galils, distinguishable from their Somoza-era counterparts by their plastic stocks.[167]

At a press conference in Managua on March 31, Nicaraguan government spokesperson Rosa Bassos told reporters that Nicaragua had intercepted a ship carrying a considerable cargo of arms destined for the FDN in Honduras. According to Bassos, the shipment had originated in Asia and had been arranged by the government of Israel.[168]

In April, a National Public Radio report noted Israeli weapons, including artillery, at the FDN's Las Vegas camp on the Nicaraguan border in Honduras.[169] Also in 1985, an authoritative Washington defense weekly reported that Israel had supplied the FDN with Soviet-made Sam-7 surface-to-air missiles, captured from the PLO in Lebanon.[170] In late 1985 a Panamanian politician said that Panama's Commander in Chief, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega had, for a price, obtained arms from Israel and distributed them to ARDE in Costa Rica.[171]

When gauging the consequences of Israel's increasing involvement in the contras' war against Nicaragua, it is important to consider the two neighboring countries where the contras are based -- and where Israel has long been active -- Honduras and Costa Rica.

Chapter 5

HONDURAS: THE ISRAELI HISTORY

Honduras has long been an Israeli arms customer. One of Israel's first sales to Honduras, refurbished French super-Mystere B-2s, were the first supersonic jets in Central America. Honduras began buying the planes in 1975, acquiring 20 of them in two years. At least some were armed with Israeli Shafrir heat-seeking missiles.[172]

The sale established what threatens to become a pattern of Israeli activity in Central America. Six of the planes involved had been re-equipped with U.S.-built engines, so U.S. law required that anyone selling them must first obtain U.S. permission or face a cutoff of U.S. aid. Israel failed to secure permission and sold the planes in violation of U.S. law. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, however, accepted the Israeli Ambassador's explanation that Israel had thought the planes were obsolete -- and Israel escaped any U.S. censure.[173]

The transaction had three main results. First, it gave Honduras the most sophisticated airforce in the region. Second, an Israeli sales decision -- contrary to the policy of a Republican U.S. Administration -- raised the technological level of military hardware in Central

America. Finally, Israel proved to Honduras and to other potential clients that, where the United States was concerned, it enjoyed general impunity. This precedent was to be repeated five years later, when Ariel Sharon attempted to introduce Israel's modern Kfir jet fighter to the region.

* * *

Honduras is the second poorest country in Latin America. In 1983, 90 percent of its population had an annual income of about $100.[174] Until 1984, the commander of the armed forces, General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, was widely acknowledged to possess decisive political power.[175] A passionate anti-Communist, he was well-known as an advocate of the Argentine-style "security state." During his tenure, disappearances and other human rights violations previously unknown in Honduras became a significant problem. Alvarez was also an organizer for APROH, a subsidiary of the Unification ("Moonie") Church in Honduras (the Moonies have taken an active role in supporting the contras politically and militarily).[176]

Israel signed a cooperation agreement with Honduras in 1967, but the only projects Israeli experts undertook were road building, preparation for a course on transportation, and the establishment of a workers' bank.[177] Yet Honduras' military leaders -- who have governed for decades and even now still exercise the real power behind an electoral facade -- have always been eager to acquire the latest in weaponry. Besides the Mysteres, early Honduran arms purchases from Israel included three Arava STOL aircraft bought in 1976,[178] Galil rifles, and Uzi submachine guns.[179] In 1982 Honduras was rated one of Israel's three biggest customers, along with Taiwan and South Africa.[180] By 1983 it boasted an "Israeli-made fleet of RBY [armored] vehicles, armed with 106mm recoilless rifles."[181]

As is often the case, Israeli advisers accompanied the hardware. By 1981 the presence of Israeli radar operators at a Honduran airbase was being reported.[182] Israeli advisers have trained the Honduran special forces squadron and some of Honduras' pilots.[183] It has also

been said that only U.S. and Israeli pilots are capable of negotiating some of Honduras' landing strips.[184] Israeli training increased as a result of Ariel Sharon's visit in 1982.

Sharon's Proposal

On December 7 of that year, Ariel Sharon arrived in Tegucigalpa with a proposition. He was given a formal state welcome and met with Gen. Alvarez Martinez.

To this day there is little information on exactly what Sharon sold. What is known is that Sharon was offering weapons captured during Israel's invasion of Lebanon the previous summer. Honduras took some of these arms and passed them on to the contras.

A senior Honduran official told the Associated Press that "Sharon had signed a deal to sell . . . numerous arms." The presence in Sharon's party of the Israeli airforce chief, the director of Israel's Defense Ministry, and Mexico-based David Marcos Katz, Israel's principal arms dealer in Latin America, belied Sharon's lukewarm attempt to deny that he had come to make a major transaction: "We don't deal in things like that".[185]

As the Nicaraguan government worried about the implications of Sharon's visit, diplomats in Tegucigalpa said that the talks "were focusing on a long-term treaty of military assistance." Later reports indicated that the agreement included tanks, weapons, and Israeli training of Honduran officers, pilots, and troops. The training was to be carried out in Honduras and Israel and the first shipments were to be delivered within months. A Honduran officer confided that "a second phase of arms sales may involve more sophisticated weapons, such as missiles." Sharon praised Honduras' democratic system as he arranged a future exchange of high-level delegations with Gen. Alvarez.[186]

According to diplomats in Tegucigalpa, Gen. Alvarez was particularly interested in acquiring sophisticated aircraft. In July 1982, the general had made a secret visit to Israel, with the reported aim of upgrading Honduras' air force with Israel's Kfir C-2.

Alvarez had previously tried to obtain U.S. F-5s and French Mirages but, wishing to keep such advanced equipment out of the region, both France and the United States had refused to sell.[187]

Because it contained a U.S.-made engine, the Kfir that Alvarez wished to buy was also subject to U.S. approval and the Reagan Administration was expected to veto such a sale. U.S. policymakers had been adamantly opposed to the introduction into the region of such a sophisticated plane. If Honduras took delivery of advanced jets, the reasoning went, Nicaragua would have a justification to obtain from the Eastern Bloc the equivalent MIGs it had been considering.[188]

Nevertheless, Sharon and Alvarez signed an agreement for the sale of 12 Kfirs.[189] They had reasons of their own for believing they could make the Reagan Administration change its mind -- and maybe even finance the purchase.

Sharon's Second Proposal

The Kfirs, however, were not the totality of the transaction. In retrospect it is apparent that Sharon's primary mission in Honduras was to arrange with Gen. Alvarez for Israel and Honduras to assume control of the contras. According to a contra leader, in fact, Sharon actually met with the directorate of the main contra group, the FDN.[190]

The job of training, equipping, and directing the mercenaries then being assembled in Honduras had just fallen vacant. Argentina's military government had provided training, supply and logistical support for the contras sinces 1981. Angry at the United States for backing Britain in the Malvinas (Falklands) War in the summer of 1982, Argentina terminated its support. Sharon was in a position to know this, because Israel had been a major supplier of arms to Argentina during the war.

Both Sharon and Alvarez were politically inclined to intensify the war against Nicaragua. Alvarez had openly said he would be happy to stage an invasion. "General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez has told U.S. officials

privately that he intends to celebrate his next birthday in Managua. His birthday is December 12," wrote Jack Anderson a year later, near the end of 1983.[191]

Sharon believed that Israel's strategic interests stretched far beyond its borders. In late 1981 he had signed a security agreement with the Reagan Administration which, in his interpretation, established Israel as an agent for the United States in situations where for political reasons the United States had to keep a low profile. Although the agreement was suspended after Israel annexed the Golan Heights in early 1982, Sharon always insisted that the "proxy" part of it remained in effect.[192] (See full discussion of this U.S.-Israel agreement in Chapter 9.)

A few days before Sharon's arrival in Tegucigalpa, Reagan had met with Central American leaders in San Jose, Costa Rica -- but, as a Honduran official intimated, "Reagan only uttered platitudes. . . . " Sharon's trip was more positive. Alvarez had been complaining that the United States was stingy with military aid to his country, and he also had "severe doubts about the depth of the U.S. commitment to defend the region from leftist insurgencies." According to one report, Sharon's decision to follow Reagan to Central America was made so fast that neither the Israeli government nor the U.S. State Department knew about it until his arrival in Tequcigalpa.[193]

Honduras clearly had no money to buy all of the Israeli wares it ordered during that visit. Sharon, having noted Reagan's helplessness, may have flown to Honduras to suggest that he and Alvarez join forces to do what Reagan could not in supporting the contras. The moment he returned to Israel, Sharon made a public appeal to the Reagan Administration to finance the sale he had just made to Honduras.[194]

The Reagan Administration apparently gave Sharon's three-way proposition serious consideration. Several months after Sharon left Tegucigalpa, Israel was reported to be "on the verge" of selling Honduras Kfir-C2 jet fighters and the United States was still giving Sharon's proposal active consideration, in effect seriously entertaining a decision that would put Israeli commercial

considerations above specific, fundamental, and important policy considerations of its own.

The Administration might have entertained such a notion either because the White House wanted to bring about Nicaragua's long-anticipated acquisition of Soviet MIGs -- an excuse to attack Nicaragua -- or simply because it was giving in to Israeli pressure. In either case, in March 1983, the Reagan Administration was reported to be "considering giving its approval" to the sale.[195] The influence of Israeli priorities on U.S. decisions concerning Central America is the more impressive, considering that in 1982 the United States had not permitted Mexico to buy the equivalent F-5.

Before any three-way deal was consumated, both Sharon and Alvarez were removed as military leaders. Alvarez was flown to Cost Rica in handcuffs in March 1984, and Sharon was stripped of his position as defense minister for his part in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon.

The possibility of a greater Israeli role in supporting the contras remained attractive to Honduran leaders. Honduran officials have long worried over the likelihood that, if Congress stopped funding the contras, the United States would simply abandon the 10,000 mercenaries on Honduran territory to their own unsavory devices.

In June 1984, Honduran military leaders recommended that Israel -- or perhaps Chile, Colombia, or Brazil -- be enlisted as a U.S. substitute.[196] That same month, the Panama City affiliate of the Spanish news agency disclosed that the United States had hired Israeli, Chilean, and Brazilian advisers to work with the contras in Honduras. "Their purpose is to make the presence of U.S. advisers here less evident," said the news agency, which also noted that Israel's military presence would be further reinforced in coming months.[197]

Chapter 6

ISRAEL AND COSTA RICA

Because of its democratic government and enlightened policies, Costa Rica is held in higher international esteem than most of Israel's allies in the developing world. Its ties with Israel consequently differ from those of other Central American countries.

In July 1982, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin met with newly-elected Costa Rican President Monge in Washington. The two needed no introduction, for Monge had once been Costa Rica's former ambassador to Israel. His wife, Doris Monge, is Jewish and a member of a leading family in Costa Rica's close-knit Jewish community of 2,000.

Costa Rica's Jewish community has strong ties with Israel. Many of Costa Rica's Jewish young people have gone to Israel, to visit or to stay; "pictures of Israeli heroes line the hallway" of the Jewish Community Center.[198] The strength of this community was a factor in the great amount of attention early Israeli governments paid to Costa Rica.

During the 1960s Israel lavished technical aid upon Costa Rica and ran a patriotic youth movement there.

In turn, Costa Rica supported Israel at the United Nations. When Mexico had difficulty raising the capital for a proposed Yucatan assembly plant for Arava aircraft, the Israeli embassy in Mexico threatened to set up the plant in Costa Rica.[199]

In 1982 Monge wanted Israel's help in renegotiating Costa Rica's huge debt. His nominee for Foreign Minister, Fernando Volio, had said that "a principal preoccupation of the incoming National Liberation Party (PLN) would be its relations with Israel." During his campaign for the presidency, Monge had promised to move Costa Rica's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.[200]

A number of areas of cooperation were agreed upon during the Monge-Begin meeting. Israel announced a loan to Costa Rica and enlisted the support of the U.S. Jewish community in helping Costa Rica renegotiate its foreign debt -- at the time the highest per capita in the world -- with private banks.

Monge made good on his campaign pledge and ordered the relocation of Costa Rica's embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The move made Costa Rica the first country to defy UN Resolution 478, which asked the world's governments not to acknowledge with the presence of their embassies Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem.

The two countries told of plans to build a "dry canal" across Costa Rica, connecting the Pacific and Atlantic and offering an alternative to the Panama Canal. Also mentioned was a $600 million Disneyland-like tourist complex.[201]

A three-day visit to San Jose by Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir in October 1982 brought further enhancements to the relationship: an Israeli promise to promote Costa Rican tourism in the U.S. Jewish community, scholarships for Costa Rican students to study in Israel, the gift of a tractor "to the people of Costa Rica," and a commitment to leave an earlier $7 million loan on deposit for an additional six months.[202]

Israel has fulfilled its promise to promote Costa Rican tourism in the United States. A catalog of tours

put out by the American Jewish Congress extols Costa Rica's virtues:

> Can you imagine a country with no army, no pollution, no illiteracy? A land with dramatic vistas, near-tropical climate, Scandinavian tidiness and democratic traditions, where the friendliness is overwhelming and our fellow Jews wait eagerly to welcome us both formally and informally? COSTA RICA, one of only two countries in the world to have an embassy in Jerusalem, offers unrivaled delights and our visit is an act of Jewish appreciation.[203]

As to that first challenge to the imagination, Israel has been as eager as the Reagan Administration to negate it by working to establish a Costa Rican military.

Costa Rica constitutionally abolished its army in 1948 (after beating back a coup engineered by Anastasio Somoza I). Since then it has managed to keep the peace with two loosely organized police forces, the Civil and Rural Guards. The lack of an army and a corollary declaration of neutrality enjoy tremendous popular support in Costa Rica. However, as journalist Martha Honey noted in 1983,

> Both the U.S. and Israel have been quietly pressing Costa Rica to convert these police forces into a conventional army. One American military intelligence analyst termed the guards "the worst-equipped defense forces in all Latin America," and an Israeli diplomat noted caustically that "with two machine guns you can take this country."
>
> Jeane Kirkpatrick, then U.S. representative at the UN, is reported to have told Costa Rican officials in 1981 not to expect U.S. economic assistance unless they built an army, and in subsequent high-level discussions both U.S. and

Israeli officials are said to have taken a similar position.[204]

After his meeting with Begin, Monge said the Israeli leader "showed great readiness" to give Costa Rica military aid. Two months later the Israeli government confirmed Begin's offer. Costa Rican government officials acknowledged a "standing Israeli offer to assist in building up [Costa Rica's] security forces."[205]

In January 1983, Costa Rica's Public Security Minister Angel Solano Calderon visited Israel and met with Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and the armed forces chief of staff. In addition, he visited "various defense plants" and toured the occupied West Bank and Golan Heights.[206]

In July 1983 the Costa Rican rural guard received a shipment of 500 Israeli Galil rifles. Costa Rica's Information Minister revealed that his government had purchased 1,500 Israeli submachine guns. Costa Rica also "hired three Israeli experts to design a national anti-terrorism plan. This plan, however, was never put into effect."[207]

Costa Rica has accepted Israeli training of its security police,[208] including a newly-created "Special Intervention Unit."[209] According to U.S. officials, Israelis have also assisted with "intelligence activities" in Costa Rica.[210] In May 1986, it was announced that Israeli advisers would train a 30-man unit called "combate antiterrorista" (anti-terrorist struggle).[211] According to Costa Rica's Deputy Security Minister Johnny Campos, Israelis have provided training in the "complex intelligence field . . . so that they [Costa Ricans] may provide personal security for important dignitaries."[212]

In May 1983 the Committee of Families of Costa Rican Political Prisoners told a press conference in Mexico City that Costa Rican society had embarked upon a process of increasing militarization and repression. The Committee said that the use of torture had increased as a result of training given by advisers from Israel, Argentina, South Korea, and the United States.[213]

Strategic Border Project

"We already have many new roads in the north that have emerged in a surprising manner," noted a Costa Rican Member of Parliament in May 1984. "They probably gave us very discreet loans to finance the roads they needed."[214]

Another result of the Washington meeting between Monge and Begin was, in fact, an Israeli commitment to build a fence across Costa Rica's northern border with Nicaragua. This was no simple fence, but a "settlement plan" to create a "security belt" between the two countries. The fence itself was said to be of the advanced electronic sensing type which Israel has installed on the perimeters of the territories it occupies and around much of South Africa's borders.[215]

Northern Costa Rica is geographically isolated from the rest of the country. Much of the population is of Nicaraguan descent and has long identified with Nicaragua rather than Costa Rica. Costa Rica commissioned the engineering company Tahal, an Israeli parastatal, to do a study of ways to strengthen the border.

Tahal came back with a $240 million proposal for an agribusiness scheme. Costa Rica didn't have that kind of money, and the director of the USAID office there thought the plan was too elaborate. "We wanted a simple project," he said. "It could be that the first part of the project, just the road, will be enough."[216] The United States, of course, was interested in northern Costa Rica for purely strategic reasons: basing, supplying, and facilitating the work of the contras operating in the area.

According to Jack Anderson, the Israeli plan entailed settling each of 1,000 families on 50 acres of barely usable land along the border. According to Anderson, a trilateral task force which included the Costa Rican Vice-President, the Israeli Ambassador to Costa Rica, and U.S. representatives coordinated the project. Anderson reported that President Reagan took a personal interest in its implementation, discussing details twice with Costa Rican President Monge and writing a letter of support on September 20, 1982.

Funding for the project, which USAID officials titled Northern Zone Infrastructure Development, was estimated to be as high as $500 million, and "one administration source acknowledged that [US]AID would never have given such an economically risky project top priority if it weren't for the political implications."[217]

The road building has proceeded.[218] In 1983 USAID gave Costa Rica a $19 million loan for the project. Gen. Paul Gorman, then chief of the Panama-based Southern Command of the U.S. Army, visited Costa Rica and offered to put U.S. National Guard troops to work building the roads, while U.S. officials said that the Pentagon would finance the road building.[219] In March 1985 the United States gave Costa Rica another $55 million for roads in the northern zone.[220] Costa Rican truck drivers and rural guardsmen interviewed a month later reported that Israeli military advisers were present along the Nicaraguan border, well situated to train contras as well as Costa Ricans.[221]

With Friends Like These

During his tenure in office President Monge walked a narrow gauge, trying on the one hand to please the Reagan Administration, which has pumped nearly half a billion dollars into Costa Rica's faltering economy, and on the other, to deal with his political allies at home and in the Socialist International, who accused him of selling out to U.S. interests.

Scandals rocked his government; in 1984 it was revealed that the CIA had bribed a number of high-level Costa Rican officials to help the contras and to generate hostility to Nicaragua.[222] Monge tolerated the presence of contra bases within his borders and permitted U.S. supply planes to land in northern Costa Rica.

The Israeli ambassador to Costa Rica has reportedly been helpful to the contras in more ways than one. In 1982 Hector Francis, an Argentine adviser to the contras with political misgivings about the program, defected. At a Mexico City press conference, Francis said that the Israeli ambassador in San Jose was supplying Israeli passports and aliases to contra leaders so that they could

travel throughout the region.[223] According to Eden Pastora, the ambassador sold Israeli weapons to the contras.[224]

Costa Rica has received some benefits, including weapons and a few million dollars, from its association with Israel. Some Israeli advisers are undoubtedly working on socially useful projects. Currently, Israel has about 100 development experts working in Costa Rica.[225]

However, the close ties between Israel and the Monge government have also cost Costa Rica. The transfer of Costa Rica's embassy to Jerusalem resulted in Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia breaking relations with Monge's government. On June 12, 1984, more than 800 of the 1,800 delegates to an International Labor Organization (ILO) conference in Geneva walked out when Monge stood to speak. They weren't all from Arab countries: the Eastern Bloc, China, India, and other nonaligned countries joined the walkout.[226]

A coffee boycott by all of the Arab governments and moves in the International Coffee Association to cut Costa Rica's quota also were announced at Geneva. Coffee exports are responsible for 28 percent of Costa Rica's foreign exchange earnings.[227]

Apparently untroubled by all of this, just before his term of office expired in 1986, Monge visited Israel and declared on Israeli radio that no other people in history could "show evidence of such loyalty to its capital as the Jewish people. . . ." Monge also spoke in support of Israel's October bombing attack on Tunisia. Monge invited all of Israel's top officials to visit Costa Rica,[228] an invitation accepted by Foreign Minister Shamir, who visited Costa Rica for the inauguration of Monge's successor the following May. During his tour Shamir also visited Guatemala and Honduras.[229]

Chapter 7

THE VIEW FROM ISRAEL

The Export Imperative

While there are political considerations which drive Israeli leaders from both Labor and Likud into deeper Central American involvement, politics is not the primary consideration. It might accurately be said that Israel's principal motivation is economic -- the need to sell arms.

Israel's dependence on arms exports has never been greater. Averaging at least one billion a year during the past five years, weapons sales constitute at least 20 percent of Israel's industrial exports.[230] State-owned arms factories employ 18 percent of the Israeli labor force; and the state owned Israeli Aircraft Industries (IAI) is Israel's largest employer -- and its largest exporter.

Military production is now equivalent to 30 percent of Israel's gross national product. Conversion to civilian (consumer) production, advocated by some critics of the heavy dependence on weapons sales, is at best a long-term proposition.[231]

The ability of Israel's military forces to equip themselves also depends on the arms industry's foreign sales. Without a steady flood of orders from abroad, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) must pay higher unit costs for its own equipment.[232] In addition, for emergencies the military has come to depend on the availability of arms produced for foreign orders. Commenting on this intimate relationship between arms production and arms sales, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir noted recently, "In general we know that countries that manufacture arms must also export arms. Otherwise they are incapable of maintaining a weapons industry."[233]

Israel's current economic crisis has necessitated large cutbacks in Israel's military budget. In 1985 IAI, which is the biggest employer in Israel, suffered a 20 percent drop in domestic orders due to government budget cuts. In March 1985 Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin told 4,000 workers at just one IAI plant that unless some new export contracts were signed they faced immediate layoffs -- a serious problem in a nation of Israel's size. Within a year, in fact, a general downturn had afflicted all the major Israeli arms makers -- already in the process of laying off workers.[234]

Any such blow to Israel's arms industry directly injures two major elements of what, together with the military establishment, is called the "pro-arms" coalition: the unions (representing weapons workers) and the industrialists. Both the large government-owned enterprises and the smaller private concerns which supply them suffer not only an immediate drop in income, but a future loss in research and development capability due to the emigration of some of their most talented engineers.

Thus the health of the arms industry has become a crucial factor in determining the health of the entire state. Israeli arms sales peaked at over $1.2 billion in 1982. When sales dipped 6 percent in 1983, analysts began warning that, because of the world economic slump, growing competition from Brazil and other developing countries, and its own continuing political isolation, Israel's arms sales were more likely to decline than increase unless corrective measures were taken.[235]

Traditionally, sales to Central American countries have been modest in comparison to sales to such major Israeli customers as South Africa, Argentina (until 1983), Chile, and Iran (until 1978 and again from 1980 to the present), but they have nevertheless been important.[236]

Now, with the pressure to export, their importance is increasing. Israel is unable to compete with manufacturers in NATO countries and is barred for political reasons from selling to most Eastern Bloc, nonaligned, and Islamic countries. On the other hand, arms sales to governments in Central America do not contradict Israel's general world outlook. Israel finds itself politically aligned with governments of the region (except, of course, the government of Nicaragua) and against its national liberation movements. The solidarity expressed by many of these movements for the Palestinian cause gives Israel grounds to oppose them. Indeed, the governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador (and Panama as well) fit the "composite profile of [Israel's] typical customer," as described by Israeli arms sale expert Aharon Klieman:

> A composite profile of the typical customer for Israeli arms. . . is most likely to be. . . a defense-conscious government, rightist in orientation, in which the military is either the actual or proximate locus of power. It is confronted by a security threat originating either domestically or from a neighboring country. . . . like Israel, it too is isolated diplomatically and under international criticism, and therefore encounters problems in meeting military requirements from other sources of supply.[237]

Special Interests

Decisions on Israel's increasing involvement in Central America, including its increasing role in the arming and training of the contras, rest with a small core of senior ministers who are highly susceptible to the desires of the "pro-arms coalition," which most strongly favors such involvement. Drawn from Israel's manu-

facturing, union, military, and government sectors, this "pro-arms coalition" constitutes "a formidable special interest group and political lobby."[238] Despite the resistance of domestic critics, its power -- buttressed by the government's decision making processes which shield the proponents of arms sales from scrutiny -- is almost certain to give the sales advocates the edge in any future wrangle about the contras.

Many of Israel's senior officials and top arms industry executives have known each other during long military careers and share a similar outlook. Explains Klieman:

> Their understanding of modern Jewish history, with its themes of the Holocaust and powerlessness, reinforced by long professional military training, causes these elites to be impressed by visible manifestations of power and strength. . . . they perceive of arms sales as not only perfectly natural for Israel but as adept diplomacy by other, less conventional means. . . . This "foreign policy" and corporate self-interest of the arms companies and their representatives appear in recent years to be acquiring a momentum and an independence of their own.[239]

The pro-arms political leaders have used their "momentum" (and the "association" of their transactions with national security) to move all discussion and decision making about arms exports into a private setting, beyond the public domain. From the initial contact by an Israeli salesman -- frequently a former military officer -- the consideration and execution of military sales pass through people wholly devoted to increasing arms exports.

In 1983 the Israeli Defense Ministry set up a foreign relations unit to oversee "the coordination of the political aspects of the Defense Ministry's activities overseas in everything pertaining to arms sales." The final decision on a sale is made by a "Ministerial Committee on weapons transfers, whose members are the prime minister, the foreign and defense ministers, as well

as the minister for industry and commerce."[240] The present Minister of Industry and Commerce is Ariel Sharon.

So bound up is the arms lobby with the perceived national interest that only a few insiders openly object to current policy.

Democracy in Action

Israel's "arms diplomacy" has, however, drawn criticism from a number of other quarters. Critics, such as Professor Klieman, believe that a foreign policy and an economy based on arms exports are short-sighted, self-defeating, and not infinitely expandable.

The Israeli left also opposes Israeli arms sales to right-wing regimes. There are small but active Israeli solidarity committees with Nicaragua and the Salvadoran people, the former founded as a result of the Mapam visit to Nicaragua last year.[241] Despite more immediate issues, such as Israel's military activities in Lebanon and the rapid growth of the anti-democratic Israeli right, Israeli activists have raised the issue of arms sales on a number of occasions.

As for the Israeli public in general, Professor Klieman believes that there is a "national consensus" in favor of weapons transfers, and that such sales are popular. On the surface that appears true -- but that surface impression results from the inaccessibility of the issue to public control. In fact, just as a majority in the United States opposes aiding the contras, a sizable part of the Israeli public has expressed opposition to arms sales to rightist regimes. In a 1983 Jerusalem Post poll, 35.2 percent of the respondents were against selling weapons to "racist and dictatorial regimes," and 27.9 percent believed Israel should sell weapons only to democratic governments.[242]

The Israeli press itself has occasionally expressed the latter sentiment. In an editorial written in April 1984 -- at the height of the Reagan Administration's drive to enlist Israel as its agent in Central America -- the Jerusalem Post noted that, if the stories

the Administration was confirming about Israeli aid to the contras were true:

> This would mean that Israel had become a mercenary of the U.S. administration in a course of policy that is highly controversial in the United States itself. . . . To sell arms out of necessity -- more justifiable in Israel's case than in that of the other countries in this awful trade -- is one thing. To act as the agent of the CIA that is being hemmed in by the U.S. Congress is another altogether.[243]

Abba Eban, who has held a variety of diplomatic posts and served as Israel's foreign minister, also has expressed opposition to Israel's proclivity to arm right-wing former U.S. clients. In 1984 he told an interviewer:

> So far as Israel specifically is concerned, I think we ought to want to be more of a regional power and less of a world power spreading our Uzis and Galil guns all over the world. Although some countries, like France and Britain and Switzerland, have made arms a purely commercial commodity, separate from any kind of emotion or ideology, we haven't. Where you have an Uzi or a Galil, somehow an Israeli flag appears. And we ought to avoid being the instrument of anybody else. If the United States thinks that El Salvador or Honduras should have more arms, . . . good enough -- but do it yourself. All right, accept that you have problems with Congress, face those problems. What I dislike is the notion that if it's not convenient for the United States to arm a certain country because that country isn't popular or because Congress is parsimonious or because the Americans are sensitive to the human rights issues, Israel can be drafted to act as an American surrogate. That's certainly a role we shouldn't accept and

that the United States shouldn't seek to impose upon us.[244]

Abba Eban is now chair of the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee, ostensibly in a position to do something about those arms sales. That he has not done so underscores the reality that such decisions are strictly an insiders' game -- where he has no power.

Other members of the Knesset have made several attempts to bring arms sales under parliamentary authority, or at least scrutiny. Just as the U.S. Congress jealously guards its power of appropriation, a number of Israeli parliamentarians have fought the concentration of power and the secrecy in which Israel's military customers are selected. They have not, however, made very much progress.

In addition to secrecy, parliamentary procedures have made legislative action difficult. The government ministers and the Knesset speaker, for example, can simply refuse to answer parliamentary questions. When, after the Israeli embassy in Guatemala was bombed for a second time, MK Shulamit Aloni requested "the government to reveal the number of Israeli military advisers in Guatemala and the level of arms sales to the Guatemalans . . . a spokesman for Prime Minister Menachem Begin [refused] . . . on the grounds that Aloni 'doesn't know what she's talking about.'" The Israeli press quickly produced evidence to the contrary, and Abba Eban, who evidently did know the level of arms sales, asked that arms sales to Guatemala be stopped. They were not and the issue simply faded away.[245]

The Progressive List for Peace, a new Arab-Jewish party which won two seats in the Knesset in the July 1984 elections, has been firing off memoranda to Knesset and Cabinet officers. They have demanded to know about Israel's military relations with Sri Lanka, South Africa, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the contras.[246] Their questions, however, remain unanswered -- as do those routinely submitted over the years by Knesset members from the Communist Party.

Proposed legislation to control arms sales has fared no better. In 1982 Mapam [then part of the Labor

Alignment] MK Dov Zakin proposed a bill banning military sales to Central American dictatorships and giving the Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee a say in arms sales policy. Although one popular Labor MK, Yossi Sarid, supported the measure, it was spurned by the rest of the Labor party.[247]

In 1986 the party's platform Committee discussed these same issues but, due to the influence of party head Shimon Peres, failed to stake out a strong position.[248] The Labor-led government of Peres has instead continued to pursue an arms export policy similar to that of the 1977-84 Begin-Shamir period. It has included arms sales to Iran, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Cameroon, and the contras in Central America.

Thus, although a segment of the public and some Left and Liberal members of the Knesset oppose the dependence of the Israeli economy on arms exports and the policy of exporting weapons to rightwing repressive regimes, they simply do not structurally have any ability to change these policies created by the "ministerial committee on weapons transfers" and the powerful "pro-arms coalition." And the system is locked in on this track for the foreseeable future.

Chapter 8

A VIEW OF ISRAEL

From the standpoint of those in the United States who favor intervention to support the right wing in Central America, Israeli intervention is often viewed as more effective than the U.S. presence it has replaced. For several reasons Israel is able to implement the rightist ideology espoused by Ronald Reagan better than the CIA or any other U.S. agency possibly could.

The Professional Touch

For one thing, the legend of its military competence above all else makes Israel a good surrogate. Many Central American rightists such as Salvadoran Col. Sigifredo Ochoa in fact rate Israel above the United States in this respect.

When Israel is the major prop for a Central American government -- as in Nicaragua under Somoza, in El Salvador until 1980, and in Guatemala between 1977 and 1986 -- there are fewer "ripples" in the local political status quo. Israel is under no compulsion to produce an attractive political "center" in the "host" or client country, whereas U.S. leaders have always pressed the CIA

or other U.S. agents to produce a "credible democrat" -- such as Duarte of El Salvador -- that Congress will agree is worthy of our support. As an American expert in Honduras told Time Magazine, "Israel operates without the restrictions imposed on us ....It doesn't have to explore the abuse of human rights."[249]

Any "case" Israel takes over has usually already been deemed ineligible for aid by the U.S. government. Israel's role is then to make the client government, no matter how reprehensible, invulnerable to all domestic opposition, whether political or military.

Beyond Reproach

The special esteem Israel enjoys in the United States also makes it an effective surrogate. Israeli support of repressive Central American governments has not drawn fire from either Congress or the peace and anti-intervention movements -- even though Israel's economic dependence on the United States suggests it would be susceptible to a demand to cease its activities in Central America.

In Congress, Israel's supporters -- among them, ironically, some of the most outspoken opponents of U.S. policy in Central America -- wield a considerable amount of power. Within the peace movement, many organizations have difficulty achieving unity on issues involving Israel and the Middle East (or discussing them at all). These two factors help divert attention from the Israeli role.

This unwillingness to confront Israel's intervention has limited the effectiveness of the peace and anti-intervention movements concerned with Central America. When their efforts to restrict a direct U.S. role result in Israel's taking up that role, they back off the issue. Israeli involvement thus places it politically out of reach.

The issue is out of reach in practical terms as well, for when Congress relinquishes power to make its foreign policy by allowing Central American activities to be turned over to another country, U.S. activists, whose interaction on the federal level is most likely to be

through their congressional representatives, lose direct access to the foreign policy process.

Writes Paul Findley:

> Few members of the House of Representatives . . . have criticized Israeli policy in recent years. To a great extent this results from the vigilance and skill of that government's lobby on Capitol Hill which reacts swiftly to any sign of discontent with Israel.

Paul Findley is a former member of Congress who became a target of Israel's lobby and eventually lost his seat after he began to challenge U.S. Middle East policy.[250]

The Congress would freely criticize Taiwan, Thailand, or any other proxy the White House might induce to assist in its Central American operations. Newspapers would run front-page stories, and constituents would organize Congressional lobbying campaigns. Yet although Israel was at the elbow of the Guatemalan military for eight years of terrible slaughter, no criticism was leveled at Congress for allowing Israel to continue doing what it had forbidden the U.S. to do -- and no scandals emerged from Guatemala to haunt U.S. policymakers.

Israel's lobby overpowers the anti-intervention groups that lobby Congress on Central America issues, even when those groups represent constituents in the home district. The votes leading to the passage of the 1986 Foreign Aid Bill offer a striking example. In June 1985, House leaders refused to separate a $1.5 billion emergency supplemental aid appropriation for Israel from a $25 million request for the contras. The choice for liberal members was clear: satisfy the demands of Israel's lobby or take a stand against continued U.S. support of the contras.

Among the liberals who voted for the bill was Sala Burton (D-CA). It was difficult to disappoint her numerous Central American constituents, said Burton -- numerous refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala, many of them under the protection of San Francisco's active

sanctuary network resident in her district, "but I couldn't let Israel go."

For legislators from neighboring districts who opposed the bill, a local Jewish newspaper that is usually noted for its liberalism could barely restrain its scorn:

> [Barbara] Boxer joined such staunch Israel supporters as George Miller and Douglas Bosco, who, torn between support of Israel and support of the Sandinistas, chose the Sandinistas.[251]

No one may ever know how many House liberals finally betrayed promises made to constituents -- and possibly their own principles -- to help pass a Foreign Aid bill containing $4.5 billion for Israel: for the July 11 vote, members opted to keep their moral compromises off the record.

The 1985 legislation, whose total was $12.8 billion, also contained a repeal of the nine year-old Clark amendment (which had forbidden a U.S. covert war against Angola); money for Cambodian and Afghan anti-government forces; a ban on aid to Mozambique; and a ban on U.S. aid to any overseas family planning program which "promotes" abortion. This package presented so difficult an ethical dilemma for many members of Congress that the House passed a bill on a voice vote "to avoid a recorded vote that could prove politically troublesome."[252]

So Many Ways To Pay

Israel's enormous yearly U.S. aid packages would appear to offer great opportunities for shunting illicit funds to the contras.

The simplest method of transfer is a "gentlemen's agreement" whereby Israel simply passes along some of its U.S. military or economic aid to the intended recipient in Central America. A variety of accounting devices can conceal the U.S. maneuver. Although a strict accounting is required of most aid recipients, Israel's use of aid is virtually unmonitored. In addition, Israel has rarely

been turned down when it or its supporters in Congress request additional or emergency aid or other concessions.

Recyling aid became even easier when a conference committee rewrote the "Pell Amendment" to the 1985 Foreign Aid Bill, changing its intent of forbidding the funneling of contra aid through third countries to forbidding the President to coerce third countries to make kickbacks to the contras.[253]

Informants speaking to This Week-Central America and Panama about a 1984 Israeli donation to the contras

> . . . have been careful to note that such funds were "Israeli" and not a part of the U.S. package sent to that country. But such quibbling still adds up to a barely dissimulated transfer of U.S. aid from Israel to the contras.[254]

In other words, as in the case of the $21 million that Israel "loaned" El Salvador in 1981, Israel can be "reimbursed" -- and quite lavishly -- by the very legislators opposed to direct appropriations for the contras. Because the transfer of U.S. funds is never debated or voted on, constituents who oppose contra aid never have an opportunity to lobby against it.

Pleased to Take Over the Contras

Even more than under-the-table money, the Reagan Administration has wanted Israel to take over the direction and supply of the contras. Israel's unique status in Central America, with its extensive network of military ties, has made it appear to the Reagan Administration as ideally suited for this task.

> From the moment it drew its first designs against Nicaragua, the Reagan Administration's strategy was predicated upon the use of another government as a surrogate -- one that could launder funds and take active control of a covert war untroubled by U.S. public opinion. At first Argentina performed that role, organizing

> the anti-Sandinista mercenaries and acting as their quartermaster. But in 1982, angered by U.S. support for Britain in the Falklands- Malvinas war, Argentina pulled out."[255]

Public Pressure

The Administration first tried to directly -- and publicly -- involve Israel in this effort in July 1983. It had not seized upon Ariel Sharon's bid in late 1982 to run the contra operation, probably because of objections within the Israeli cabinet, which would shortly shift Sharon from his defense portfolio to at-large status, and also because of the difficulty of approving and financing Kfirs for Honduras. Moreover, in 1982 the CIA was able to fund and run the mercenary program (although it did a very inept job of it).

In 1983, however, Congress and the American public were just finding out about the "covert" war against Nicaragua, and opposition to funding the part of the CIA budget that financed that war was beginning to grow. The Administration went out of its way to call attention to Israel's activities in Central America. Senior Reagan Administration officials claimed that Israel had enlarged its role in Central America and that

> Israel's coordination with the Americans marks a departure from its previous activities in Central America as an independent supplier of arms. The new role brings Israel closer to acting as a surrogate for the United States.[256]

Israel was not pleased to be designated a U.S. proxy; an Israeli diplomat said that Israeli activities were unrelated to the policies of the United States.[257]

In April 1984, the Administration again raised Israel's name as a potential proxy. The nation -- and in turn the Congress -- had been reacting strongly against the CIA's recently revealed mining of Nicaragua's port of Corinto. CIA funds for the contras were within days of exhaustion, and Congressional Democrats, having made the

Administration's "covert" war an issue from the beginning of the 1984 election campaign, seemed most unlikely to appropriate any more money. The Administration urgently sought Israel's aid for the contras.

At this point CIA Director William Casey, made a desperate proposal that Saudi Arabia or Israel take over the contras. Bob Woodward, who broke the story of Casey's request in the Washington Post, pointed out just how unlikely a Saudi role would be:

> The Saudis generally disagreed with many aspects of U.S. policy in Central America. The Nicaraguan government, which the CIA is harassing through its support of the contras, is essentially pro-Arab, while two U.S.-backed countries in the region -- Costa Rica and El Salvador -- recently moved their embassies in Israel to the city of Jerusalem.[258]

Woodward continued that Israel, on the other hand, owed CIA director Casey a favor, as Casey had been sharing satellite intelligence "so valuable to the Israelis that no price tag could be put on it."[259] [It was this satellite intelligence that made possible Israel's bombing of Iraq and Tunisia, as well as the invasion of Lebanon.]

On the night Ronald Reagan was re-elected, his co-workers created an atmosphere of hysteria by releasing information, later discovered to be false (an exercise in "perception management," the White House called it), that Nicaragua had received a shipment of MIG-21 aircraft.

On January 24, 1985 the President told legislators from Central and South America that Libya, Iran, and the PLO were using Nicaragua as a launchpad for subversion. That same day, Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) said that, since the Administration couldn't get Congress to fund the contras, "then you find a different route." According to the New York Times, the route that Lugar suggested was "having other countries provide the funds or other means" to continue the war.[260]

As the White House tried to create a pro-contra mood in Congress during the spring of 1985, it alternated

between announcing that it was asking Israel and "friendly Asian countries" to take over the contras and insisting that such suggestions were just "trial balloons."

In truth, Israel was the only country among those mentioned that was either competent or at all willing to take on the job. Taiwan, the only one that was even remotely likely to have the capability, was at that time one of Nicaragua's most reliable arms suppliers and a favored trading partner.[261] (Nicaragua has since established relations with the People's Republic of China.) As the White House bandied Taiwan's name about, Taipei announced that it had just signed a multimillion-dollar barter agreement with Nicaragua involving Nicaraguan cotton and Taiwanese textiles. Taiwan's Managua embassy issued an unequivocal denial that it was considering aiding the contras.[262] Thus in the eyes of the Reagan Administration, the job logically fell to Israel.

Strategic Understanding

Israel and the U.S. have concluded a number of agreements -- in 1979, 1981, and 1983 (this last resulting in a Strategic Agreement signed in March 1984).[263] All spell out in principle a U.S. undertaking to finance Israeli arms sales to third countries and to permit other recipients of U.S. military aid to spend part of that aid on Israeli military goods and services.[264]

Through this device the United States could finance Israeli arms sales to Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala, with the understanding that part or all of the materiel would be passed on to the contras. It is very possible that the agreements might have included a commitment on Israel's part to provide such sales and other aid to unsavory customers.

There is as yet no evidence that the authority for such transactions has yet been granted. In fact there is considerable evidence that it has not been: Sharon's unsuccessful attempt to get the United States to finance a major arms sale to Honduras in late 1982, for example, and Israel's June 1984 pleas to Congress and the Defense Department to allow other countries to spend their U.S. grants and loans on Israeli weapons.[265]

There is, however, no reason to doubt that such concessions might be made to Israel as part of a future deal. Israel has an amazingly good record of winning exceptions in the U.S. Congress. It is the only country to gain permission to spend U.S. aid on development and procurement of its own weapons systems instead of on U.S. arms. For example, Israel developed its Merkava tank with U.S. military credits, which set a precedent for the same financing arrangement for the Lavi multi-role combat jet, Israel's fighter for the 1990's.[266] The dollar amounts involved, furthermore, would probably not be great compared to Israel's overall U.S. aid package. In addition, Israel's popularity in Congress might dispose many legislators to favor increasing aid to potential Israeli customers like El Salvador or Honduras.

Israel is in fact the only nation to operate its own special USAID development program for Third World countries, a benefit established by Congress itself. In the Continuing Budget Resolution of 1984, Congress set up a fund to be used exclusively for Israeli technical assistance programs in developing countries. Now in its second year the program, called United States-Israel Cooperative Development Research, is supposed to finance projects in countries where Israel has no diplomatic relations. (The idea is to try to coax recipient nations into formal relations with Israel.)

However, although the limit for each grant under the program is $150,000, three projects in Central America are getting a total of $850,000 for 1986. One of the three, an irrigation demonstration in Choluteca Honduras, is close to the Honduran-Nicaraguan border -- in an area of significant contra activity. The $393,000 project in Costa Rica is in Guanacaste, also near the Nicaraguan border. The project in El Salvador will put the Israelis -- they are employees of Mashav, Tel Aviv's equivalent of AID -- in touch with a new private growers association which could come to wield significant political power.[267]

Another possible special fund -- this one seems to have been completely and blatantly outside the budget -- was considered by the Administration in late 1983 as an activity of The President's Task Force on International Private Enterprise. Ostensibly intended to increase the participation of the private sector in foreign aid, the

Task Force was apparently a channel for unmonitored distribution of budgeted and unbudgeted aid funds for foreign enterprises.

Israel was the only foreign government involved in planning the task force. David Kimche, the long-time Director-General of Israel's Foreign Ministry -- and before that a Mossad operative for many years -- appeared before the task force committee.[268]

Yet another mechanism with the potential for funneling Israeli aid to the contras is the U.S.-Israel political-military committee. This committee was established during the summer of 1983 and formalized in a comprehensive agreement concluded by Israel and the United States in November of that year. The committee meets regularly to coordinate a variety of activities, including coordination of initiatives in the Third World. It has been thought that the Reagan Administration's main interest in the committee is its use as a vehicle to deliver money to the contras. A 1984 report noted that the subject of Israeli technical assistance to Central America has been discussed at each meeting.[269]

David Kimche has represented Israel at these meetings also. In April 1984, when the Administration was expressing a particularly urgent desire to see Israel take over administration of U.S. policies in Central America, Kimche met with State Department and White House officials, including Langhorne Motley, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Both Israeli and U.S. analysts concluded that the meetings involved an outright quid pro quo: on the one hand, U.S. money for prestigious Israeli development projects in countries whose goodwill Israel wanted to regain; on the other, a higher Israeli political profile in support of Administration positions on Central America.[270]

Both task force and political-military committee talks were going on at a time when Israel was working very hard to stage a diplomatic comeback in several African countries. Rapprochement with the 22 sub-Saharan African countries, which had broken relations with Israel after its 1973 war, has been a key priority for Kimche, and U.S. funding of Israeli activities in targeted countries is considered a critical element in that undertaking.

In early October 1984 -- just before reports began to emerge about direct Israeli aid to the contras -- Kimche came out of a meeting of the President's Task Force elated about "the biggest breakthrough yet," decisions that were "likely to pave the way for some extensive projects involving U.S. funds and Israeli manpower and expertise in assisting developing countries."[271]

Israel apparently bargained hard with the Reagan Administration. Despite extending some money and arms to the contras, it insisted on keeping a low profile. Acting as somewhat of a restraint on the Israeli position was the fact that the Democratic Party was making the President's Central America policies an issue during the 1984 electoral campaign. Liberal legislators put their case quietly but strongly, and "Israeli embassy officials in Washington and pro-Israel political activists in the Jewish community, while basically sympathetic to the administration's positions," advised the Israeli government to give the contra program a wide berth.

Israel's advocates, explained Jerusalem Post correspondent Wolf Blitzer -- and as a former editor of AIPAC's (Israel's registered lobby) newsletter he was in a position to know -- "do not want to alienate Democratic critics of U.S. policy, many of whom are among Israel's most outspoken supporters."[272]

Sooner or later, however, the political or economic profits to be made by accommodating the U.S. Administration could very well push Israel into a prominent role with the contras. The Democratic opposition to the President's policies that deterred Israel in the past has given way to abject government by consensus, with Congress narrowly approving contra aid in 1986, while Israel's own reluctance to become involved is likely to give way as economic imperatives become more pressing. Congressional passage of $100 million in aid for the contras will only increase the mercenaries need for a mentor, as money alone cannot improve their military effectiveness.

Chapter 9

THESE ARE PEOPLE'S LIVES

The period that has been examined in this report began in the seventies, a time when progressives in the U.S. were filled with a great hope that a way might be found to right past U.S. wrongs in Central America.

Earlier in the decade there were the revelations of the CIA's role in overthrowing governments and replacing them with docile client regimes. In the post-Watergate national cleansing, the agency's covert capability was cut back and Congress established clear guidelines to prevent some of the CIA's worst abuses; no longer were U.S. operatives to assassinate foreign leaders, train internal police forces of other countries, or destabilize and overthrow sovereign governments.

Then came the Carter presidency, whose emphasis on human rights offered the possibility of actually undoing some of the damage done to Central American societies by dictators the United States had set up over the past century to protect its interests. The Carter policy of using U.S. aid as a lever to exact greater respect for human rights has been damned as idealistic and impractical by the successor Reagan government and as inadequate by many concerned with events in Central America.

The Carter policy was, in fact, inadequate, based as it was on the naive belief that the abatement of assassination and torture alone would be sufficient to cause a political center to materialize and institutionalize itself in Central American countries, with their vastly unequal distribution of wealth.

Nevertheless, the enunciation of the Carter doctrine was valuable for three reasons. First, it was a tacit acknowledgment of past U.S. transgressions and a statement that, rather than walk away from its mistakes, this country was obligated to help correct them by using the leverage of withheld aid. Second, the statement of the Carter human rights doctrine was a significant opening for serious debate on just what kind of relationship the United States should have with its neighbors.

A third result of the Carter human rights doctrine was its reinforcement of the notion that centrist governments might be nurtured in Central America. Despite its lack of grounding in current or historical reality, this notion remains the standard for judging U.S. policy in Central America for much of Congress and the U.S. public.

The entry of Israel into the temporary vacuum created by the purge of the CIA and the initial application of the Carter human rights doctrine aborted both amends and debate. It made a mockery of the U.S. veneration of the "democratic center"; Israel's actions in Central America contradicted in blood Jimmy Carter's noble words in Washington. And there did not seem to be much that the Carter White House could do about it.

The implications of Israel's actions during the Carter years have been covered over by the warlike, ideological fulminations that constitute the Reagan Administration's Central America policy. Unlike the Reagan Administration, which is finite in time and limited by Congress, Israel will not leave its lucrative Central American markets until something -- a change of government such as occurred in Nicaragua in 1979, or a demand from the United States -- forces it to abandon the area.

Israeli intervention has greatly contributed to a reassertion of the old brutal methods of social and

political control, which in turn fortify the old exploitative economic relationships. In some cases Israeli intervention has created new problems in Central America; in all cases it has exacerbated existing situations and made the possibility of resolution more remote.

Israeli activities in Central America have worked against both self-determination for the people of the region and the achievement of long-term U.S. objectives (whatever one might think of them) such as the Kissinger Commission recommendations of intervention alongside economic development. Instead, Israel's activities in pursuit of its own interests have often turned events in an altogether different direction.

"Israel is usually moving so quietly, so discreetly, that one tends to forget it was Israel rather than the United States which set the pace in militarizing Central America," a senior Latin American diplomat told Reuters. He was referring to Israel's introduction of jet and supersonic planes to El Salvador and Honduras in 1975 and 1977.[273]

By its deep involvement in the brutal and calculating campaign to suppress the Mayan Indians of Guatemala, Israel has also been instrumental in setting the local standard for counterinsurgency.

As armorer, mentor, and exemplar, Israel has helped inspire new but grim political realities in each of the countries in which it has operated in Central America.

In 1981 Ya'acov Meridor, an Israeli cabinet minister and a close associate of Menachem Begin, proposed to the U.S. government:

> Don't compete with us in South Africa. Don't compete with us in the Caribbean area or in any other country where you can't operate in the open. Let us do it. I even use the expression, "You sell the ammunition and equipment by proxy. Israel will be your proxy." And this would be worked out with a certain agreement with the United States where we will have

certain markets . . . which will be left for us.[274]

His proposal, christened "the Meridor Plan", became the policy of the Likud government and became a key provision of the Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Cooperation, signed by the U.S. and Israel on November 30, 1981.

Because the U.S. foreign policy making process is subject to a certain amount of public scrutiny and a modicum of congressional restraint, the Reagan Administration has not been able to bring such an agreement to Congress (although there is no doubt that it would if it could, and a successor administration of either party would probably adjust very easily to the arrangement). But the spirit of Israel as agent, certainly, is already operative.

The 1977 unauthorized sale of jets to Honduras demonstrated Israel's ability to act as a political fixer for Central American regimes in Washington. Over the years, the desire of Central American governments to have Israel work out their problems with Washington has grown. Their problems seldom involve efforts at democratization; on the contrary, the Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan governments and the contras (or at least their CIA masters) consider their plans endangered by Congressional attempts to condition their aid on such efforts.

Should the contras in Honduras be transferred to Israel's care, in fact, a pattern similar to that established in Guatemala is likely to be repeated. The contras will have no further need to make a good impression on Congress and the U.S. public, so contra atrocities against Nicaraguans will increase, while media accounts of them and public outcry against them in the United States will diminish.

However, the major danger of Israeli intervention in Central America is its potential for furnishing support for the ultra-right factions in the region. A greater Israeli presence in Honduras, for instance, has the potential to subvert the fragile constitutional structure that Hondurans had hoped would develop into a democracy free of military domination. Yet in Tegucigalpa, the risk that Israel might someday build up a new military strongman who would be as eager as Alvarez once was to partici-

pate in regional strife was, in 1985, apparently more acceptable to some than the continued U.S. backing for the contras (and the consequent dominant U.S. presence in Honduras) which seemed so subject to the will of Congress.

The prospect of Israeli support replicating -- in Honduras and El Salvador and among the contras -- the conditions it helped create in Guatemala is clearly undesirable. Israel's involvement in Guatemala helped insulate that government from any U.S. (or international) political pressure. In Guatemala under the military, Israel had more political leverage than the United States. The flow of arms and counterinsurgency and technical advice have reinforced the brutal excesses with which the Guatemalan military leaders established control over the indigenous population. In the occupation of the Indian highlands, those officers have modeled their techniques on Israel's. It is not lost on them that Israel successfully defies world opinion in the violations of Palestinian rights.

That the entire isthmus could become the "hidden holocaust" that is Guatemala is no mere nightmare. Central American rightists envy the Guatemalan rulers for their freedom from U.S. dictates and appreciate the value of Guatemala's close relationship with Israel. Many also have openly advocated cutting loose from U.S. restraints and working in tandem with Israel to rid Central America of "Communist infiltration."[275]

These aspirations seem very much in keeping with those of the Reagan Administration -- but by January 1989 the Reagan Administration will pass. These Central American ultra-rightists may well remain -- and they are serious. Former Salvadoran Col. Guerra y Guerra recalled that he often heard Salvadoran officers say that casualties 10 or 20 times the 30,000 peasants slaughtered by the military in 1933 would be an acceptable price to pay for quelling the insurrection in El Salvador.[276]

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION: AN ISSUE OUT OF REACH

In the United States the hallmark of Israeli intervention is the silence that invariably clamps down around it. This silence has profound implications for the health and efficacy of the U.S. political process.

It must be stressed that Israel's role and its consequences are not merely a phenomenon of the Reagan Administration. There are few circumstances in which Israel will not become involved in Central America. Israel began its current round of activities in Central America during the Carter years, as an indirect consequence of the human rights doctrine.

It is difficult to determine whether Carter foreign policymakers were annoyed that Israel leapt into the breach, relieved that Israel was keeping order in the region, or simply indifferent. Few former Carter officials have been willing to respond to questions about the Administration's dealings with Israel over Central America, but it is most likely that the Carter White House did not want to confront Israel. Toward the end of his term, President Carter shelved a White House investigation of a nuclear weapons test Israel conducted with South Africa to avoid political pressure from supporters of

Israel displeased with his conduct of the Camp David negotiations.[277]

Congress is also reluctant to tangle with Israel. Few would deny that Israel's lobby, which almost always commands the acquiescence of a healthy majority of both the House and Senate, is the sole arbiter of U.S. Middle East policy in Congress. Members of Congress are sometimes not happy yielding to the lobby's demands, but they fear it will turn its PACs against them come election time, so they go along.

No matter that the nation's major dailies have run several front-page stories on Israeli arms sales to Central America. No matter that Democratic liberals are reliably reported to have pleaded with Israel in the spring of 1984 not to become more closely identified with the Reagan contra program. Several dozen calls to Congressional offices made during late 1984 and early 1985 did not uncover one member of Congress even willing to admit knowing that Israel was involved in Central America.

After a May 1984 search for a legislator willing to comment proved fruitless, columnist Nick Thimmesch reported, "There is no more-hushed-up story in American government and politics these days." Thimmesch noted that some of the most vociferous Congressional critics of the President's policies in Central America were also among Israel's most ardent supporters:

> Indeed, it is amusing to watch liberal Democrats like Senator Christopher Dodd, and Congressmen Stephen J. Solarz and Michael Barnes, righteously oppose Reagan's urgent proposal for increased arms shipments to besieged Central American nations. These critics do not acknowledge that their votes for generous military aid to Israel can make it possible for the Jewish state to provide the very weapons to Central America that these Democrats don't want there.[278]

Congressional unwillingness to initiate discussion of Israel's role in Central America has been matched by constituents' silence on the issue. This silence is

understandable: where Israel is concerned, the situation in most congressional districts is quite analogous to that within Congress. Almost everywhere, an aggressive pro-Israel organization exists to discourage -- often with unfair accusations of anti-Semitism -- any criticism of Israel. Thus those active in anti-intervention and solidarity organizations are inclined to focus exclusively on the U.S. role in Central America and avoid making waves -- and losing support. This self-imposed silence is especially poignant in the case of Guatemala, where U.S. involvement has been marginal since 1977.

The failure of U.S. activists to speak out, to nudge their representatives in Congress to oppose Israeli intervention in Central America, is a source of great disappointment to Israelis who oppose that intervention. (It is also distressing to Central Americans who see the U.S. stamp of approval on the Israeli weapons and advisers loosed against peasants and insurgents.) In 1982 Israel Shahak, an Israeli human rights activist who distributes translations from the Israeli press to English-speaking scholars, attached the following comment to his translation of an article about the intelligence computer that Israel installed in Guatemala:

> It can be safely asserted that a huge scandal would have followed if any other state except Israel capable of building and operating such a center had sent it to Guatemala in 1981. . . . but Israel can continue to do this because the majority of the so-called American "liberals" and "radicals," who would have protested violently against such a computer center made in the U.S.A., refuse to say a word of protest when such instruments of technological murder are exported by Israel.

Shahak and many other critics of Israeli government policies often stress that given Israel's great dependence on U.S. aid, U.S. pressure could make Israel change its policies -- not only in Central America, but in the Middle East and Southern Africa as well.

Few would argue that it is healthy to make public policy in secret. The proceedings of the Church

committee, which investigated CIA abuses in the mid-70's, evoked a considerable amount of public anger over revelations of past covert operations. The U.S. system of government is predicated upon the democratic principle that constituents elect representatives on the basis of their political positions and then lobby those representatives on the issues of the day. The democratic principle cannot function if the elected representatives have no opportunity to make decisions on those issues.

If the subject of Israel's growing presence in Central America is unmentionable, then the temptation to resort to Israel rather than deal with the hard divisive issues becomes irresistible to pro-intervention elements of the U.S. government.

As less and less of U.S. Central America policy is conducted in the name of the United States, it will become easier to avoid the discussion fleetingly initiated in the early days of the Carter Administration: What should be the U.S. role in righting the wrongs of more than a century of paternalistic treatment of Central American nations? Discussion of what might be a sane and ameliorative policy toward Guatemala became largely academic, although much of the violence in Guatemala could be attributed to the legacy of the 1954 CIA coup. That issue was in a real sense out of our hands.

If the contras are passed completely into Israel's keeping, there might be a new sense of stability in Tegucigalpa, but the issue of the sapping war against Nicaragua would be removed from the political agenda in the United States. The President who follows Ronald Reagan will not have a chance to articulate a different policy toward Nicaragua; reluctance to criticize Israel will halt Congressional consideration of the contra program, and, if the silence that has muffled the holocaust in Guatemala is any example, the issue of the contras will never again be presented for consideration by the U.S. public. It will have been placed out of reach.

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